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Senior Art Director	Jon Schindehette
Web Specialist	Chris Sims
Web Production	Bart Carroll, Steve Winter
Contributing Authors	Mike Mearls, Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Robert J. Schwalb, Owen K.C. Stephens, James Wyatt
Developers	Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Rodney Thompson
Editor	Miranda Horner, Gary Sarli
Cover Artist	Kekai Kotaki
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Cartographers	Robert Lazzaretti, Sean Macdonald, Mike Schley
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Special Thanks

Richard Baker, Greg Bilsland, Logan Bonner, Michele Carter, Jennifer Clarke Wilkes, Andy Collins, Bruce R. Cordell, Jeremy Crawford, Rob Heinsoo, Peter Lee, Mike Mearls, Kim Mohan, Cal Moore, Stephen Radney-MacFarland, Peter Schaefer, Stephen Schubert, Matthew Sernett, Chris Sims, Rodney Thompson, James Wyatt

Party to Build Character

I'm one of the advocates of the player entitlement that's a big part of the *D&D* game these days. My agreement with Stephen Radney-MacFarland's "Yes" mantra is complete. I think Scott Kurtz, perhaps channeling Chris Perkins, sums it up well in this PvP strip. The point is that players in my games quickly learn that they can try anything and that they can tell a story about their characters, and we'll all work with any problems that might crop up.

It's not that I didn't play enough old-school games. I just believe that letting my players exercise creativity and interject narrative control is a good thing. In my gaming group, when a mechanical element causes a problem, I find that allowing this freedom pays me back. My players trust me, and they're all savvy enough to see when a rules element isn't working ideally. Sometimes they won't point it out, but if something is interfering with play, we work together to house rule it.

That sort of approach isn't always appropriate, because when I feel motivated to say "no" to a rules element or a player, it usually has little to do with the rules as written. It's often a matter of personal taste. Like all DMs, I'm looking to create a specific experience at the table, and my players have similar tastes and desires, so steering the campaign in a particular direction inevitably improves our experience.

For instance, I don't like magic items that put the responsibility on me, as DM, for constant tracking. I have enough to do. Take the *cloak of distortion*. It imposes a constant –5 on ranged attacks made from more than 5 squares away. In the best case, I remember the cloak before attacking a PC wearing it, because it's clear the monster can see the cloak's effect. Usually, however, I announce a ranged attack on the PC only to be reminded of the cloak. Then I have to either suck it up or change targets, neither of which is satisfying.

When I create a campaign, I encourage my players to use what they know about the campaign to build their characters. More importantly, I usually ask them to create relationships among the characters. Ultimately, since the *D&D* game is cooperative, character building is really party building.

Sure, I've played games where I threw the party together. I started one campaign in which the PCs were captured as fodder for an eldritch machine that ensured an aging wizard's life would last decades longer. Add a malfunction that kills the wizard and turns the characters loose, and the first adventure is a romp that requires the PCs to escape from his fortress.

It was fun. But it didn't work as well as campaigns I've run in which the party members have ties that bind. The PCs had no reason to stick together after they survived their escape. The game just works better if the characters have similar goals and interests.

Even when I ask for this, it doesn't always work. Each of my players has a different place on the spectrum of committed versus casual. One of my players treats his character backgrounds with all the serious thought of a dedicated novelist. These elaborate concoctions work only until he comes up with a concept that thwarts another player's desired character choice or he makes his character an island. For example, he might create a character with a hatred of the infernal so intense that he won't tolerate an infernal warlock another player wants to make.

No matter how much good potential a character story has, I have to say "no" when that story steps on the desires of other players. I do so by guiding the discussion about the new character toward compromise and party integration -- toward a solution I can say "yes" to. Having a cohesive party is too important to allow my storyteller player total freedom with some of his lone-wolf ideas. Fortunately for all of us, he never seems so attached to his ideas that we can't come up with a compromise. Even the most dedicated roleplayers usually recognize the importance of the group bond.

Now, if I could only influence the players who have a casual attitude to be a little more like my hardcore storyteller with regard to their character stories. Maybe if they knew I'm more likely to kill PCs who have no important story connections ... but I digress.

In all seriousness, I try to reward the story work my players do for my game. I prefer the hardcore storyteller's details, even the troublesome ones, to nothing. It's easier to trim the fat from detailed character stories than it is to work with a PC who has no apparent motivations or history.

In a roleplaying game, less is not more in this context. Detailed PCs who have detailed connections to one another make for a game that is more immersive and personal.

Chris Sims

Web of Chains

By Owen K. C. Stephens

An adventure for 13th-level characters

illustrations by Raven Mimura and William O'Connor
cartography by Jason Engle

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"I can see now that trafficking in our…merchandise…on the open seas left us vulnerable. We will use the depths of the Underdark to our advantage and reforge our empire on the backs of fresh slaves. The Bloody Chain will not just survive, it will flourish! The people of Kragholm have long experienced the rewards of their slavery practice. Now it is time for them to know the other end of the lash."

–Ghorfal the Voracious

"Web of Chains" is a D&D® adventure for five 13th-level characters. This is a stand-alone adventure featuring neogi, creatures recently presented in the *Monster Manual® 2*. It's set in a wild, forested region known as the Kragholm, near the village of Elmhollow. As a location-based adventure, it can be adapted to fit any region with river, woodlands, and little local law.

In this adventure, the heroes encounter a village in the grip of marauders who are forcing the local population to aid their efforts to ravage the local area for raw materials. The marauders are the forward element for a group of neogi slavers moving into the area, and the materials are being shipped downriver and used to construct a slave market and fortress. Following the river to the fortress site, the heroes encounter more neogi agents and eventually confront the great old master that rules the neogi clan.

BACKGROUND

The Bloody Chain clan is an ancient group of neogi slavers and merchants ruled by Ghorfal the Voracious, the eldest neogi of the clan. The Bloody Chain were once voyagers across vast seas, commanding slave ships with green sails that struck terror into the hearts of all that saw them. The Bloody Chain traded with devils, drow, and evil giants, and they even aspired to build their own empire until a group of heroes struck them down. Although they burned all the green-sailed ships and left most of the Bloody Chain neogi dead, Ghorfal and a few of his servants survived.

Too large to be easily moved, Ghorfal took to inland rivers and flat-bottomed barges as a way to remain mobile. Through cunning trade and his considerable personal power, he has brought the Bloody Chain from the brink of extinction and turned it into a small but dangerous raiding band. Ghorfal still craves the greater wealth and influence he once commanded on his slave ships and is taking a great gamble to reclaim his lost status. Ghorfal leveraged what treasure and slaves he has left to hire enough mercenaries to aid him in building a new, permanent stronghold. Using his old contacts, he has spread the claim that he already controls a vast slave bazaar where creatures of all species can be bought and sold. Come spring, his buyers will begin to arrive, and he must finish his base of operations before then.

Ghorfal has set his sights on the Kragholm, a valley of small, independent communities. Ghorfal hopes not only to sell its inhabitants but also to take over their small slave trade. Because he needs building materials quickly, Ghorfal sent a band of his mercenaries to take over Elmhollow, a village near the foot of the valley. The local population is being forced to harvest the nearby forest and float the logs downriver into the valley, where they will provide Ghorfal with the materials he needs. Wishing to keep his neogi kinfolk close to him, Ghorfal has assigned a band of mercenaries, cyclopses, and drow to command Elmhollow.

The people of Elmhollow tried resisting the mercenaries, with disastrous results. The mayor, Hayten Stoneshanks, was killed, and a revolving series of drow put in charge. The late mayor's son and daughter (Iraz and Ethaine, who are twins) then organized a resistance which attacked and drove off the drow. Ghorfal responded by sending more drow, backed by cyclopses. They crushed the resistance and made it clear that they were part of an even larger organization. Iraz and Ethaine were enslaved, with Iraz kept in the local jail (now a slave pen) and Ethaine shipped off to Ghorfal's camp. The populace of Elmhollow is now cowed, unwilling to risk the wrath of whoever commands the drow. The common folk toil long hours to refit Elmhollow as a slave-holding fortress and to cut enough lumber for Ghorfal to construct his base of operations. They have worked under the drows' control for weeks and given up any hope of rescue.

Progress is slow, however, and Ghorfal has commanded that deliveries of both materials and slaves be increased so his bazaar is complete come next season. Over the past few days, the young and healthy of Elmhollow have been imprisoned in the slave pen for even the slightest offenses. Once a dozen prisoners have been taken, the drow send them downriver to Ghorfal. The remaining villagers are being worked to exhaustion. In the meantime, the drow and cyclopses spend as much time as they can in hiding, hoping to draw in potential visitors to capture as further slaves.

ADVENTURE SYNOPSIS

The heroes arrive in the forest around Elmhollow after an uneventful trip, either summoned by an old friend or because it is along their existing route. The area is being lumbered extensively, with most of the villagers spending long hours cutting down trees and hauling them to the nearby river. Though the people are obviously working themselves hard, they refuse to explain why they are in such a rush. They tell the PCs to direct any questions to the mayor, who is located at the southern edge of the village.

The PCs might be able to reveal the presence of the mercenaries prior to arriving at the new slave pen, or they might go there unaware of their potential danger. Facing off against the mercenaries, the heroes discover that the drow and cyclopses want them alive

as prisoners. Once the mercenaries are defeated, the Elmhollow villagers (including those already captured) tell the true tale of the past few months, including that all lumber and prisoners have been sent downriver at the order of a lord named Ghorfal, who no villager has seen. For the rescue of these prisoners, the Elmhollow elders offer what reward to the PCs they can.

Following the river takes little effort, and the logs already sent by Elmhollow float downstream as the PCs ride along the bank. Though they spot signs of other logging groups deforesting the area, none are encountered. The PCs do come across a small barge moving along the river, with a neogi and a cyclops on board and two mezzodemons following along. The neogi seeks to capture the PCs, leading to a battle on the log-jammed river. If the neogi realizes it is losing, it sends a mezzodemon to warn Ghorfal that trouble is coming, possibly leading to a chase-scene skill challenge.

The river leads to the Chain Bazaar, an incomplete fortress where raw materials and slaves are gathered by Ghorfal's forces. A number of slaves can be heard screaming because they have been placed around the feeding pit, where neogi spawn swarms (under the care of a bone naga) seek to consume them. One of the prisoners is Iraz. If rescued, he directs the PCs through a back route into the main courtyard of the Chain Bazaar, allowing them to bypass Ghorfal's incomplete defenses.

In the courtyard, the PCs confront the great old master, and Ghorfal gives the order for them to be killed rather than captured. When he is defeated in this final showdown, Ghorfal swears that though his empire is gone, the PCs have not seen the last of his race.

Setting

"Web of Chains" is played out in three discrete areas. The adventure begins in the village of Elmhollow, which has been under Ghorfal's rule for several weeks. Here the people toil under the watchful eye of their captors, who themselves do their best to conceal their existence until they can unleash an ambush.

After freeing Elmhollow, the PCs move along the river toward the Chain Bazaar. They encounter further evidence of the Bloody Chain neogi clan's growing power and face off against their first neogi in a battle across the log-choked river.

Aware of the true nature of the threat they face, the PCs reach the Chain Bazaar. Outside the walls, they encounter a hoard of feeding neogi spawn and must act quickly to rescue several slaves left in a pit to feed the growing horrors. The PCs can then fight their way past the stronghold's walls (or be led into the main courtyard by Iraz, if they rescue him). Here they confront Ghorfal and his closest guards.

Treasure

Since this adventure is unlikely to take characters all the way through 13th level, no specific treasure parcels have been provided. Instead, use the parcels you planned for your entire party, handing them out after major encounters. Suggestions of what sort of treasure parcels might be appropriate are given periodically to help you decide when to hand out gold, art objects, and magic items.

Starting the Adventure

"Web of Chains" is a location-based adventure, meaning it begins as soon as the PCs arrive in Elmhollow. They need not have any particular business in Elmhollow. As a typical village, it can be en route to any place the PCs have a reason to travel to. It does not take long to realize that something odd is going on in Elmhollow, and for most groups, a mystery is incentive enough to dig deeper. If your group needs more motivation, you can send them to Elmhollow to deliver a message to its mayor, Hayten Stoneshanks, from some other ally of the PCs. Any inquiry as to the mayor's whereabouts or health receives the same response as questions about the woodcutting: Go talk to the mayor at the southern edge of the village.

Before that can happen, the group needs to arrive in the village.

Rumble on the Road

When you have decided why the PCs are on the road through Elmhollow and updated them on their travels, check the group's highest passive Perception score against the list below and read the information to the players. If players have declared that they're alert to danger or are acting that way, call for active Perception checks instead.

DC 11: *The Elmhollow Road winds placidly through cool woods. Sunlight dapples the leaves and the road, and birds sing cheerily in the branches.*

DC 18: *The road shows recent signs of heavy traffic, such as cargo-laden wagons and the movement of large groups of people.*

DC 23: *As you approach a bend in the road that opens into a clearing ahead, you realize that you no longer hear birds chirping. In brush alongside the road are a few scattered lengths of discarded chain.*

Tactical encounter: E1, Rumble on the Road (page 9).

Elmhollow

When the party reaches the town, read the following.

As the road twists through the forest, you hear the sounds of multiple axes cutting deep into fresh wood, continuing for several miles of travel. As sundown approaches, you come to an opening in the timberland, revealing a broad cleared area. Hundreds of stumps show where trees have been cleared recently, creating acres of flat land. The road cuts through the center of the newly deforested region like a scar, proceeding straight into a village surrounded by a wooden wall. Scattered groups of workers cut down trees, trim away branches, and use teams of mules to haul the logs toward the town ahead. Although most of the workers are rough-looking men, some women and even children help to log the area as quickly as they can, showing no signs of stopping despite how low the sun hangs in the sky.

At the far end of the cleared area, a partially constructed wooden wall is visible. The road passes through a crude gate, and a few buildings can be seen on the wall's far side.

The workers do their best not to interact with the heroes. Any pause for conversation could be reason for imprisonment by the drow. If asked a direct question, a worker replies that they need to complete a defensive wall around the village soon, and they plan to work into the night. Questions about why the wall must be completed, who is in charge, or how the PCs can help are all answered with "Talk to the mayor, at the south end of the village."

If the PCs insist on questioning the locals, use Encounter E2, Elmhollow.

Roleplaying encounter: E2, Elmhollow (page 11).

Breaking the First Link

Upon heading to the southern end of Elmhollow, the PCs run into this combat encounter (page 13). If the PCs have not realized something is amiss, they are ambushed at the slave pen. After defeating the drow and cyclops mercenaries holding Elmhollow for the neogi, the PCs free a few slaves, including Iraz Stoneshanks.

Tactical encounter: Breaking the First Link (page 13).

Council in Elmhollow

This roleplaying encounter takes place after the PCs have freed the prisoners in the Elmhollow slave pens. The characters learn details of the first attacks against the town and try to rally the townspeople's spirits against their persecutors.

Roleplaying encounter: Council in Elmhollow (page 16).

River War

Although no one in Elmhollow knows exactly where Ghorfal's Chain Bazaar is, they all agree he is constructing it downstream to the south. Following the river, still choked with floating logs, the PCs eventually run into one of Ghorfal's patrols. A fight breaks out along the river, with a logjam and barge making for a dangerous, shifting battlefield.

Tactical Encounter: River War (page 17).

Chain Bazaar

Following the river south, the PCs spy the Chain Bazaar in the distance, a fortress still under construction by Ghorfal the Voracious. Little more than a wall of thick logs with a few stone-and-wood towers, its vast interior courtyard is designed to hold slave pens, a main keep, and an auction block for slaves once completed. When the PCs reach the fortress, read:

The sounds of hammers and saws reach you as you come around a bend in the river. South of you, atop a hill near the river, a wooden fortress is under construction. Although it's clearly far from complete, it already presents a mighty wall

of logs and numerous piles of raw materials. A road is being leveled to give easy access to the river from the fortress, and trees are cleared for another major road that stretches east-west. Despite being in its early stages, the scale of the project shows the designers' hopes to create a vast trade center.

Allow the players to investigate the materials near the river if they wish. No one guards the twenty- to sixty-foot-long logs dragged out of the river, and the slaves working there are too tired and terrified to run even if freed.

Features of the Bazaar

Illumination: During the day, the neogi and their allies make do with whatever dim light leaks into the interior spaces of the stone towers. At night, torches are lit if needed, but unless the neogi have guests that require it, they leave the entire bazaar in darkness. If the slaves complain, they are beaten.

Outer Gates: These entries are metal gates: AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 20, 120 hp, Thievery DC 25.

Inner Doors: Inner doors are wooden and rarely locked. AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 12, 40 hp, Thievery DC 25.

Cell Doors: These locked doors are similar to the outer gates: AC/Reflex 5, Fortitude 20, 120 hp, Thievery DC 25. Only those containing slaves are locked.

Walls: The Chain Bazaar is not as sturdy as Ghorfal would like or as it will be once finished. All walls are AC/Reflex 4, Fortitude 15, 60 hp. The walls are 20 feet tall, and each has a walkway running along the top. Some walkways are two squares wide, but others are incomplete and only one square wide. The wall walkways can be reached only from the stronghold's four towers.

Towers: The only entrances currently into the Chain Bazaar are at the four corner towers. Each tower is 30 feet high and has two gates (one leading into the tower, one leading into the courtyard of the Bazaar). Stairs from the inside of the tower lead to the walls, and a spiral stair leads to the top of the tower.

Courtyard: Currently the entire Chain Bazaar is just one walled-off courtyard and four towers. The neogi must stay in tents in the open-air courtyard, as must their guests (none of which are currently present). Fire pits constantly slow-cook local wildlife, and many trees and bushes have not yet been cleared from the courtyard area.

Pits: A number of pits are used to keep slaves and young neogi spawn. Each pit is a 20-foot-deep earthen hole, with no set way to get in or out. Slaves are lowered or raised by ropes when they need to be moved.

Sound: A constant low moan comes from the slaves of the Bazaar, making it difficult to hear anything else. Increase the DC of any Perception check made to listen by 2.

Feeding Time

On approaching the Chain Bazaar, the PCs overhear cries of help coming from the western side. Investigation reveals a number of prisoners have been hung into a pit which contains numerous neogi spawn swarms. Moving around the pit is a bone naga, guarding the neogi swarms from local predators. If the PCs do not interfere, the spawn swarms eventually consume the prisoners.

If the PCs rescue any of the prisoners, one of them is Ethaine Stoneshanks, sentenced to death for trying to start a slave rebellion. Ethaine can guide the PCs to a weak point in the outer wall of the bazaar, near Ghorfal's camp. With her aid, the PCs can bypass the defensive towers entirely and attack the great old master directly.

Tactical Encounter: Feeding Time (page 19).

Ghorfal the Voracious

To stop the attacks on Elmhollow and prevent the construction of a major slave market, the PCs must kill Ghorfal, the great old master of the Bloody Chain clan of neogi. Ghorfal is well defended, with two bog hag servants and numerous neogi and umber hulks. This is the climactic battle of "Web of Chains", a confrontation with the lord of all the mercenaries and slavers the PCs have faced so far.

Although the same map is used for both Feeding time and Ghorfal the Voracious, they do not occur at exactly the same location. Instead, each takes place at a different section of the Chain Bazaar fortification, which currently has uniform features.

Tactical Encounter: Ghorfal the Voracious (page 21).

Encounter E1: Rumble on the Road

Encounter Level 12 (3,800 XP)

Setup

4 drow warriors (W)
1 drider fanglord (D)
4 human lackeys (H)

As PCs travel up the road toward Elmhollow, they encounter a drow patrol. If they're alert, they have a chance to ambush the drow; otherwise, they might stumble onto the enemy unaware.

This encounter is played on the Kings Road map from the *Fields of Ruin*™ Fantastic Locations accessory. If you don't have a copy, it can be downloaded from wizards.com as either a single sheet (www.wizards.com/dnd/files/DDM_KingsRd_sheet.zip) or as 8.5 x 11 pages that can be assembled after printing (www.wizards.com/dnd/files/DDM_KingsRd_tiled.zip).

If the PCs acheived DC 23 or higher with their Perception check before the encounter, they hear the drow approaching and can set up anywhere in the yellow box on the encounter map (anywhere within 6 squares of the west edge of the map). If their highest Perception result was less than 23, then they must set up within 6 squares of the west edge and on the road.

The drow party consists of four drow warriors under the command of a drider fanglord, and they are accompanied by four human lackeys. This group is patrolling the road, on the lookout for intruders who might spread an alarm if they learn what's going on. Their orders are to capture the intruders if possible or to kill them otherwise.

The human lackeys are slaves. They are chained together in pairs, and two figures who are chained together can never be more than 1 square apart. A push, pull, or slide effect can't force a human more than 1 square from the human he's chained to. If it would, move the affected human as far as the chain allows, then both humans fall prone in the squares they occupy. Chained humans must move simultaneously, and they have Speed 4 to reflect the difficulty of moving together. They don't need to attack the same target. If one is dead, dying, immobilized, prone, stunned, or unconscious, the other can drag the body 2 squares per move action.

Tactics

The drow hold back initially and order the human lackeys forward. While the human lackeys are between them and the PCs, the drow and drider use *darkfire* and ranged attacks. They try to poison as many enemies as possible while focusing on targets that grant them combat advantage.

Once the PCs kill or move past the human lackeys, the drow warriors engage them in melee while the drider fanglord supports them with *darkfire* and *web*. The drider uses spider climb to move beyond the reach of PCs using melee weapons.

If the drider fanglord is the only enemy remaining, it seeks to escape by leaving the map or entering an area of woods that adjoins the edge of the map, where it can climb away to safety.

The humans are armed and expected to fight (and they'll be severely punished if they don't), but they're unwilling participants. They position themselves to keep the PCs away from the drow and the drider fanglord. They never use a second move action to move adjacent to a PC. If the fight reaches a point where the human lackeys think the PCs are winning—the PCs outnumber the drow and drider two-to-one, or the remaining drow and the drider are outnumbered and all are bloodied—the humans switch sides and begin attacking their former captors.

4 Drow Warriors (W)	**Level 11 Lurker**
Medium fey humanoid	XP 600
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +11; darkvision
HP 83; **Bloodied** 41	
AC 24; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 19	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Rapier** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
+14 vs. AC; 1d8 + 4 damage (×2)	
➳ **Hand Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
Ranged 10/20; +14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 4 damage, and the drow warrior makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +13 vs. Fortitude; see *drow poison* for the effect.	
➳ **Darkfire** (minor; encounter)	
Ranged 10; +12 vs. Reflex; until the end of the drow warrior's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attackers, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.	
Combat Advantage	
The drow warrior deals an extra 2d6 damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target it has combat advantage against.	
Drow Poison ✦ Poison	
A creature hit by a weapon coated in *drow poison* takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends). *First Failed Save:* The target is also weakened (save ends). *Second Failed Save:* The target falls unconscious until the end of the encounter.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Dungeoneering +11, Intimidate +8, Stealth +15	
Str 14 (+7)	**Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 13 (+6)
Con 11 (+5)	**Int** 13 (+6) **Cha** 12 (+6)
Equipment chainmail, rapier*, hand crossbow, 20 bolts*	
**These weapons are coated in drow poison.*	

Drider Fanglord (D)	Level 14 Brute
Large fey humanoid (spider)	XP 1,000
Initiative +12	**Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 172; **Bloodied** 86	
AC 26; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 23	
Speed 8, climb 8 (spider climb)	
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+19 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 damage.	
Quick Bite (standard, at-will) ✦ **Poison**	
Requires combat advantage; +16 vs. Fortitude; 1d4 damage, and ongoing 10 poison damage (save ends).	
Darkfire (minor, encounter)	
Range 10; +16 vs. Reflex; until the end of the drider's next turn, the target grants combat advantage to all attacks, and the target cannot benefit from invisibility or concealment.	
Web (standard, recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃)	
Ranged 5; +15 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (until escape). Escaping from the web requires a DC 25 Acrobatics check or DC 27 Athletics check.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Elven
Skills Dungeoneering +15, Stealth +17	
Str 24 (+14)	**Dex** 21 (+12) **Wis** 16 (+10)
Con 22 (+13)	**Int** 13 (+8) **Cha** 9 (+6)
Equipment greatsword, leather armor	

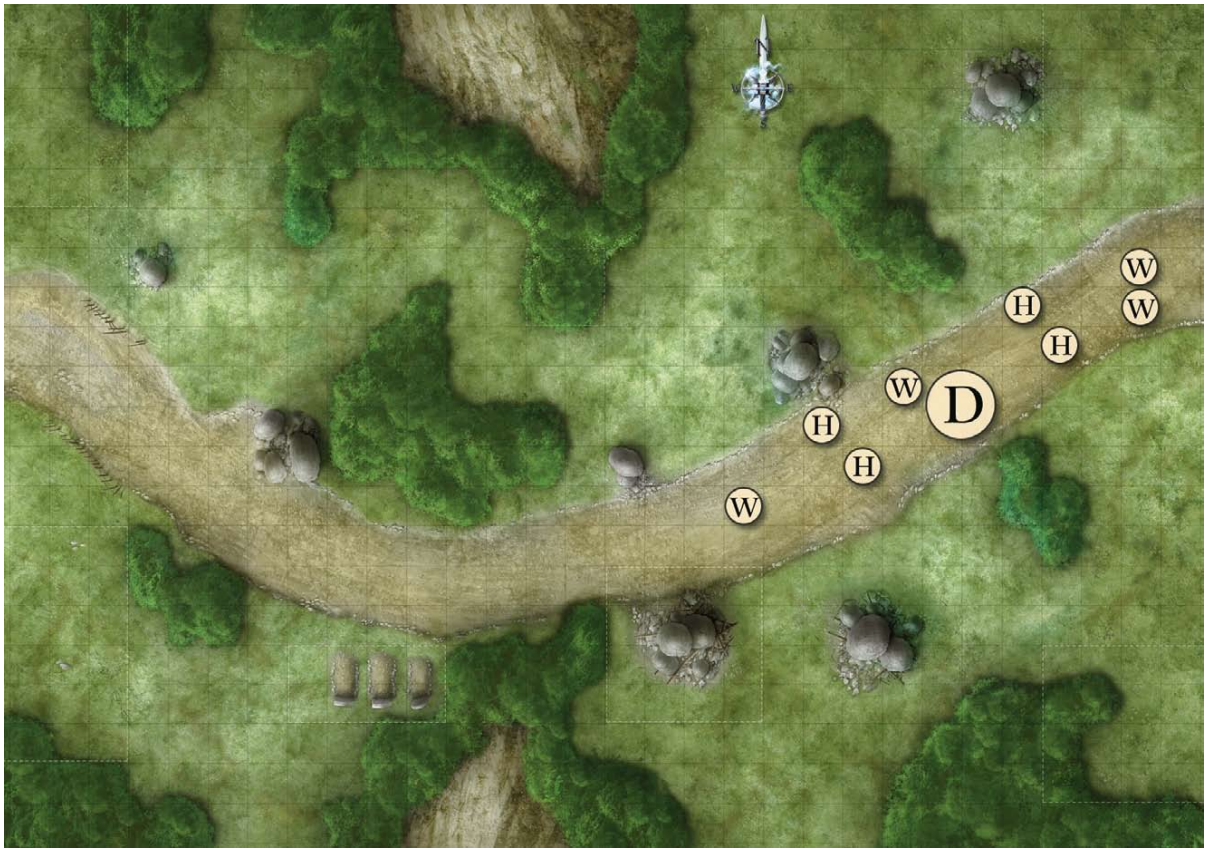
4 Human Lackeys (H)	Level 9 Minion
Medium natural humanoid	XP 100 each
Initiative +4	**Senses** Perception +5
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 21; **Fortitude** 19, **Reflex** 16, **Will** 17	
Speed 4	
⊕ **Club** (standard, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+13 vs. AC; 6 damage.	
Mob Rule	
A human lackey gains a +2 power bonus to all defenses while at least two other human lackeys are within 5 squares of it.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Common
Str 16 (+7)	**Dex** 11 (+4) **Wis** 12 (+5)
Con 14 (+6)	**Int** 10 (+4) **Cha** 13 (+5)
Equipment club, leather armor	

Features of the Area

The map represents a small clearing in the forest. Much of what appears as open ground is overhung by branches 20 feet above ground level. If the drider fanglord enters forest squares and climbs up the trees to the overhead branches (4 squares of movement), it can use spider climb to cross 3 squares of overhead, open terrain before reaching forest squares again.

Developments

If any of the human lackeys survive the fight, they can explain much of what's happening in Elmhollow to the PCs. Their presence with the PCs at the beginning of the skill challenge in E2: Elmhollow counts as one success toward completion of the challenge.



Encounter E2: Elmhollow

Skill Challenge Level 13 (1,600 XP)

Setup

In this roleplaying encounter, the PCs arrive at the village of Elmhollow and encounter the exhausted, fearful populace. Read or paraphrase the following, then use the notes below to facilitate play and answer any questions the PCs might have.

A sign by the main gate of this walled village declares its name to be "Elmhollow," and its construction is typical of those in the region. A short wooden palisade of rough-hewn logs surrounds the settlement, though it looks poorly constructed, and a ditch surrounding that suggests that the builders are considering adding a moat. A few long tables are being set up with simple meals, and they look large enough to feed the entire woodcutting workforce. The open area at the center of the village is filled with downed trees which are being stripped of limbs and bark by younger villagers and a few elderly supervisors. Several people look up at your approach but show no sign of moving to speak to you.

If the PCs make no effort to question the villagers about their attitudes or unusual dedication to clear-cutting the forest around Elmhollow, following the road through Elmhollow takes them to Encounter E3, Breaking the First Link with no hint of what waits there to ambush them (see page 13). If they investigate the village or interrogate the villagers, use the skill challenge below to see how much information can be gleaned.

Approaching Elmhollow — **Level 13**
Skill Challenge — XP 1,600

You question the villagers about the reasons for the urgency of their task.

The PCs can attempt to discern the truth about what's happening in Elmhollow, largely interacting with Deanen, Hurkon, Lynese, or Urton. If the PCs rescued at least one of the human lackeys from encounter E1 and that NPC comes with them to Elmhollow, they begin this skill challenge with 1 automatic success.

Complexity
3 (8 successes before 3 failures)

Success
If the PCs overcome the skill challenge, they learn the full story of the drow attack on the town, the death of Mayor Stoneshanks, and are warned about the drow stationed at the sound end of town. In addition, they are told that the drow instructed them to shout "Mayor!" when approaching to alert the drow to the presence of outsiders, who are then subject to an ambush. (The PCs might use this to their advantage.)

Failure
If the PCs have 3 failures, the villagers unite in telling them that the mayor is working at the south end of town. Several NPCs offer to lead the characters there, and the group is insistent. If they go, the NPC shouts "Mayor!" as they draw near to the drow post, alerting the drow to set up the ambush. If the PCs refuse to go, one of the villagers races off to alert the drow, and they come into the village looking for the intruders. In either case, see Encounter E3, Breaking the First Link.

Primary Skills
Diplomacy, Insight, Intimidate, Streetwise

Diplomacy (standard action)
DC 18 (1 success, maximum 3 successes)
On a success, the PC learns about the mayor. *First Success:* Mayor Hayten Stoneshanks was always opposed to slavery but lacked the popular support to outlaw it. *Second Success:* The mayor was killed by drow attackers and his two children were captured. *Third Success:* His daughter Ethaine was taken downriver, and his son Iraz is held prisoner at the sound end of town.

Insight (standard action)
DC 18 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
A success reveals that the villagers are miserable, frightened, and trying hard not to discuss something. *Second Success:* The PCs realize that more than one of the villagers has cast repeated if fleeting glances toward the southern end of the village, as if it is the source of their fear.

Intimidate (standard action)
DC 11 (1 success, maximum 2 successes)
The villagers are so intimidated by the drow that any threat is likely to prompt a response. *First Success:* The person reveals that two drow and a group of cyclops attacked and took over the village a few weeks ago. *Second Success:* When Mayor Stoneshanks led a rebellion, the drow were reinforced by more cyclopses. Many villagers were killed, including Mayor Stoneshanks. *Special:* After achieving 2 successes, any further attempts automatically fail. The villagers will make up fictional details about the attack and suggest that the new mayor can explain everything if sought out at the south end of the village. (This might lead to the ambush in Encounter E3, Breaking the First Link.)

Streetwise (standard action)
DC 18 (1 success, maximum 4 successes)
Although the villagers are suspicious of outsiders, engaging them in seemingly harmless small talk is a good way to get them off guard and pick up small clues. *First Success:* Some of the timber is being used to reinforce the village's defenses, but most of it is floated south along the river to someone named "Ghorfal." *Second Success:* Anyone who complains or makes trouble is also shipped downriver to "Ghorfal." *Third Success:* The village is under the control of drow who are using cyclopses as muscle. *Fourth Success:* The drow are stationed at the south end of the village. If the characters go there, they are sure to be attacked.

Secondary Skills
History, Nature

History (standard action)
DC 23 (no successes, maximum 1 attempt)
On a success, the character recalls that Elmhollow has always allowed slavery, mostly as punishment for crimes against the town or a fate reserved for enemies captured in wartime. This grants a +2 bonus to the next Diplomacy check, or it eliminates one failed Diplomacy or Intimidate check.

Nature (standard action)
DC 23 (no successes, maximum 1 attempt)
A success reveals that the people of Elmhollow have been cutting trees for weeks, more than enough to build a small town, but little of it is stacked in the area. This grants a +2 bonus to the next Insight or Streetwise check.

Villagers

A few villagers are assigned to direct any newcomers to the south end of Elmhollow and signal the drow waiting there with a shout for "the mayor." They perform these duties out of fear rather than any loyalty to their drow overlords. Use the following NPCs as typical examples of the villagers.

Deanen: Last surviving member of the disbanded village council, Deanen is an older, tired-looking man (human male, Bluff +9, Diplomacy +9, Insight +7). Once a slave owner (slavery being an accepted part of Elmhollow life), he is having trouble adjusting to the idea of being a slave. He is working for the drow, however, in hopes of being placed in charge of Elmhollow in the future. If questioned about the current situation, he lies to convince anyone talking to him to go to the buildings south of the village, crying out to "the mayor" that he has visitors if the PCs agree to speak to him.

Hurkon: Once a powerful trader and slave owner, Hurkon (dwarf male, Bluff +9, Diplomacy +7, Insight +7) is angry at the turn of events that leaves him in charge of nothing more than an axe to strip branches from trees. He's not willing to risk the wrath of the drow to help PCs while Elmhollow is controlled, but if he has an opportunity to regain freedom, wealth, or power, he'll take it.

Lynese: A young woman (human female, Bluff +7, Diplomacy +7), Lynese is a friend of the Stoneshanks twins and very unhappy about their current situation as prisoners/slaves. She upholds the local fiction of all visitors needing to speak to the mayor out of fear for her friend's lives in the drows' hands. Once Iraz Stoneshanks has been rescued, she is as forthcoming and helpful as she can be.

Urton: A burly man accustomed to work (human male, Bluff +5, Diplomacy +4), Urton is an ex-slave who doesn't see working for the drow as any different from being owned by a citizen of Elmhollow. If asked much of anything, he grunts, "Not my place to say," and then points to Deanen. A DC 18 Insight check shows Urton doesn't like Deanen.

Encounter E3: Breaking the First Link

Encounter Level 11 (3,400 XP)

Setup

1 drow arachnomancer (A)
1 drow blademaster (B)
4 cyclops guards (C)

Dry, dead bushes rustle as the wind blows past two solid-looking stone structures. The nearer one looks to be a small house, but the larger and farther building is clearly a jail of some kind. It is a newer building, with none of the wear and age visible on everything else in the village. A moat is being dug around it, and a large pile of dirt reveals that as a new effort. A few fresh graves are present, though none have been individually marked.

When the drow and cyclops are visible (either as a result of a surprise round in an ambush or because the PCs arrive before the mercenaries take cover), read:

Four massive warriors, each with only a single eye centered beneath a bushy brow, rush out swinging battleaxes. Behind them, two slender drow ready themselves for combat. The dark figure farthest back shouts a quick command to the axe-wielding warriors, who grunt in acknowledgement.

If a PC speaks Elven, they know the shouted command is "Take them alive!"

Drow Arachnomancer (A) **Level 13 Artillery (Leader)**
Medium fey humanoid XP 800

Initiative +8 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 94; **Bloodied** 47
AC 26; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 24
Speed 7

⊕ **Spider Rod** (standard; at-will)
+16 vs. AC; 1d6 damage and target is immobilized.

Venom Ray (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 10; +18 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Lolth's Grasp (standard; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic, Zone**
Area burst 4 within 10; webs full of spectral spiders cover the zone (drow and spiders are immune); +16 vs. Reflex; the target is restrained (save ends). Zone is difficult terrain until the end of the encounter; any creature that starts its turn in the zone takes 10 necrotic damage.

Spider Curse (standard, encounter) ✦ **Necrotic**
Spectral spiders swarm over and bite the target; ranged 20; +16 vs. Will; 1d6 + 7 necrotic damage and the target takes ongoing 5 necrotic damage and is weakened (save ends both).

Venom Blast (standard, encounter)
Close blast 5; +14 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 10 poison damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Cloud of Darkness (minor; encounter)
Close burst 1; this power creates a cloud of darkness that remains in place until the end of the drow arachnomancer's next turn. The cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures except the drow arachnomancer. Any creature entirely within the cloud (except the drow arachnomancer) is blinded until it exits.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Arcana +14, Dungeoneering +13, Intimidate +8, Stealth +10
Str 10 (+6) **Dex** 15 (+8) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 10 (+6) **Int** 16 (+9) **Cha** 11 (+6)
Equipment robes, spider rod

Drow Blademaster (B) **Level 13 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium fey humanoid XP 1,600

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +12; darkvision
HP 248; **Bloodied** 124
AC 30; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 24
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5

⊕ **Short Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+19 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5

Blade Mastery (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The drow blademaster makes one longsword attack and one short sword attack.

Excruciating Stab (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires longsword; +19 vs. AC; 3d8 + 5 and the target is stunned (save ends).

Whirling Riposte (free, when the blademaster's movement draws an opportunity attack, at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The drow blademaster makes a longsword attack against the triggering attacker.

Cloud of Darkness (minor; encounter)
Close burst 1; this power creates a cloud of darkness that remains in place until the end of the drow blademaster's next turn. The cloud blocks line of sight for all creatures except the drow blademaster. Any creature entirely within the cloud (except the drow blademaster) is blinded until it exists.

Whirlwind Attack (standard; recharge ⚃ ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
Close burst 1; the drow blademaster makes a longsword attack against each adjacent enemy. He can make a secondary attack using his short sword against any enemy he hits.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Elven
Skills Acrobatics +16, Dungeoneering +12, Intimidate +14, Stealth +18
Str 15 (+8) **Dex** 21 (+11) **Wis** 13 (+7)
Con 12 (+7) **Int** 12 (+7) **Cha** 12 (+7)
Equipment scale armor, longsword, short sword

4 Cyclops Guards (C)	Level 14 Minion
Large fey humanoid	XP 250 each
Initiative +8	**Senses** Perception +13; truesight 6
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion	
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23	
Speed 6	
⊕ **Battleaxe** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Reach 2; +17 vs. AC; 7 damage	
Evil Eye (immediate reaction, when a melee attack misses the cyclops guard; at-will)	
The cyclops guard makes a melee basic attack against the attacker.	
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Elven
Str 22 (+11)	**Dex** 16 (+8) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 20 (+10)	**Int** 11 (+5) **Cha** 11 (+5)
Equipment hide armor, heavy shield, battleaxe	

Tactics

If the mercenaries are able to plan an ambush, they are in concealed locations: Use the first location listed for each creature, marked in pink. In this case, they gain a surprise round unless a PC has a passive Perception score of 25 or higher. If the PCs do learn of the mercenaries' presence, they move toward the slave pen with enough caution to prevent the mercenaries from hearing them coming in time to set up an ambush, and the mercenaries are set in the second location listed for each (in purple). In this case, there is no surprise round.

The cyclops guards charge into battle to engage foes with melee weapons, quickly dispersing among their targets. As thugs who rarely face serious opposition, they prefer to attack separate targets, damaging as many foes as possible rather than seeking to flank an enemy or put down a wounded target. They have no love for the drow, obeying them out of fear and greed rather than loyalty. Although the cyclops guards don't turn on the drow, they also don't take risks to save them.

The drow arachnomancer avoids melee if possible, shooting at ranged attackers with *venom ray*, using *cloud of darkness* to avoid attacks, and *Lolth's grasp* or *spider curse* to slow any attacker that tries to reach him. If forced into melee, the arachnomancer uses his *spider rod* to immobilize a foe and move away. If the arachnomancer sees a foe use healing powers, he hits that foe with *venom blast* and attacks that foe in preference to others unless threatened in melee.

The drow blademaster attacks either any target he can flank with a cyclops or any foe that moves close to the arachnomancer. The blademaster uses *excruciating stab* only if a foe is in melee range of the arachnomancer, to allow the drow spellcaster a chance to fall back. If a number of foes cluster together, the blademaster uses his action point to rush to be adjacent to multiple foes and uses his *whirlwind attack* and then *blade mastery* against the most heavily armored foe.

Since any prisoner is a potential slave, the mercenaries don't want to kill the PCs. If one of the cyclops or drow makes an attack that reduces a PC to 0 hit points or fewer, they knock the PC unconscious rather than unconscious and dying. Such PCs remain unconscious until they gain hit points or take a short rest. (That PC should still make a saving throw at the end of his turns, because on a roll of 20, they can spend a healing surge and rejoin the fight, the same as if they had rolled 20 on a death saving throw.)

Features of the Area

Buildings: The buildings here are new, sturdy construction. The only locked doors are those for the jail cells, which require a DC 25 Thievery check or DC 30 Strength check to open. Each cell contains a few young, healthy prisoners awaiting shipment to the Chain Bazaar, including Iraz Stoneshanks, the mayor's son (see Developments).

Bushes: Several bushes of various sizes are scattered throughout the area. Any square with a bush is difficult terrain. A fire attack that hits a target in a bush square or targets an area that includes this terrain starts a fire. A character ending its move in a square that is on fire takes 1d10 fire damage. If the large bush next to the house is on fire, the fire spreads outward by one square each round to include the rest of the bush, and then the outer squares of the house.

Any reasonable effort to extinguish a burning square can succeed with a DC 15 skill check. It's up to the Dungeon Master to decide what is a reasonable plan and what skills are appropriate to implement it. Left unchecked, the fires burn out after ten or fifteen minutes, though they can take the house with them.

Ditch: As part of their plan to turn Elmhollow into a permanent slave holding camp, the drow have forced villagers to begin digging a defense moat around the jailhouse. So far, it covers only a single side and is only 5 feet wide and 10 feet deep. It can be jumped across with a DC 5 Jump check (DC 10 without a running start). Anyone pushed into the ditch, or who fails to jump it, discovers the rows of sharpened stakes concealed in the bottom.

Stake Trap	Level 10 Lurker
Hazard	XP 500

As you fall to the bottom of the ditch, the earthen floor gives way to reveal dozens of sharpened, jagged spikes pointing upward.

Hazard: A character falling in the ditch is attacked by the stake trap. A character moving carefully down the ditch under its own power is not attacked.

Perception

✦ DC 20: The character notices the tips of spear points lining the bottom of the ditch.

Trigger

Any time a character jumps down into, is pushed into, or falls into the ditch the trap is triggered. After the first time it is triggered the trap is obvious, but it continues to function.

Attack

Opportunity Action **Melee** 1
Target: Creatures in trapped square
Attack: +16 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d12 + 8 damage
Miss: Half damage

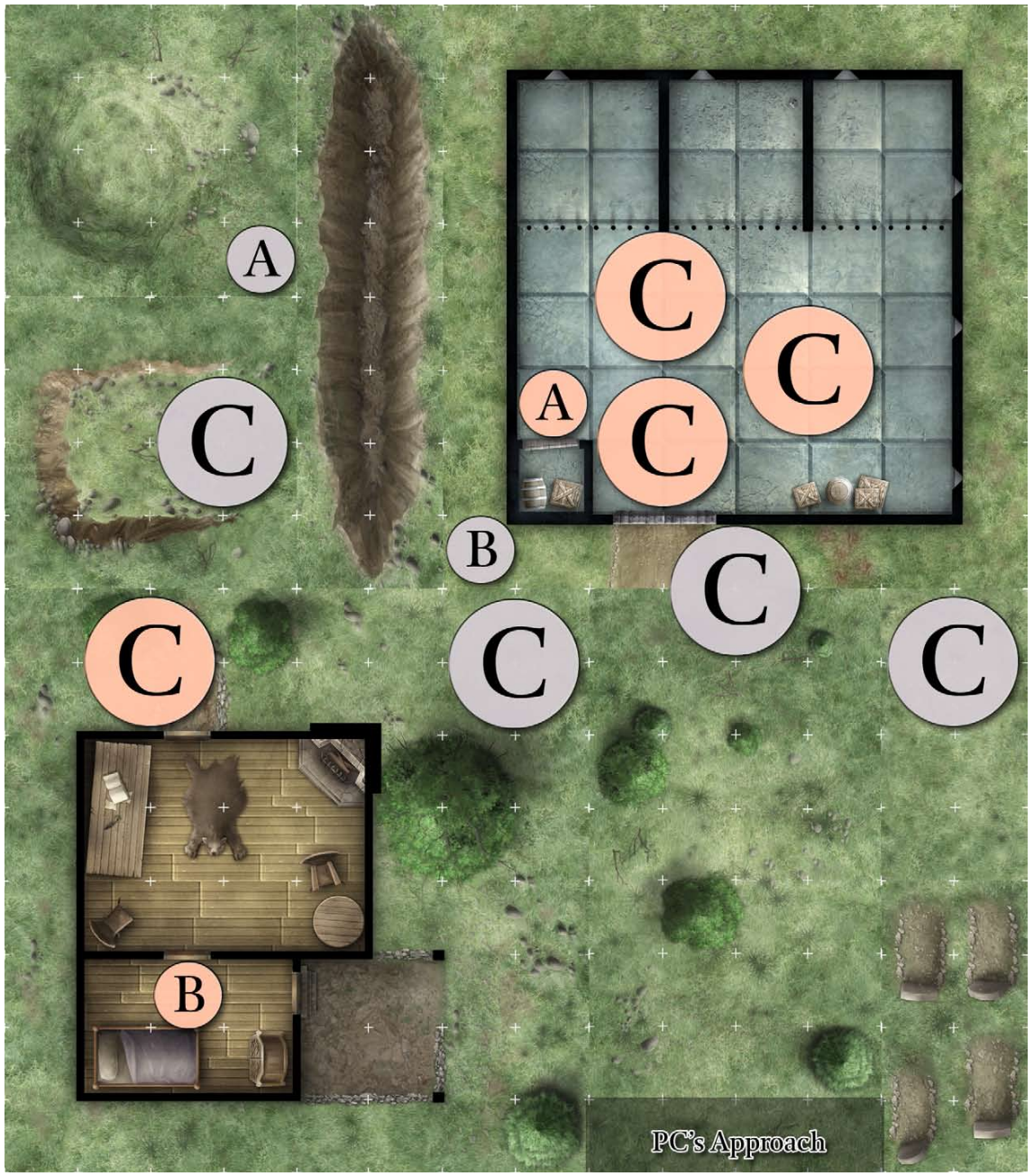
Countermeasures

✦ An adjacent character can disable a square with a standard action and a DC 20 Thievery check.

Developments

Though the two drow fight to the death, the cyclopses flee if they survive until the drow are defeated. If captured, the cyclopses reveal what little they know: They were hired to provide muscle for the drow by a creature that looks like something halfway between an eel and a spider, and more of those creatures can be found downstream. Although freed prisoners are friendly to the PCs, they are too weak from malnourishment to be effective during the fight.

A key prisoner who is rescued here is Iraz Stoneshanks, son of the former mayor. The other captives look up to him because of the strength, courage, and resistance he showed while being held prisoner.



Encounter E4: Council in Elmhollow

Roleplaying Encounter
Encounter Level 13

Running this Encounter

This roleplaying encounter takes place after the PCs free the prisoners in the Elmhollow slave pens. Let it run as long as the players seem interested, but don't delay allowing the PCs to move on with the adventure.

With the drow and cyclopses eliminated, the people of Elmhollow don't know what to do next. Many of them fear more mercenaries are on the way already and that their situation will become worse when the mercenaries arrive. They are afraid of what will happen if they stay in town, but they are even more afraid of what might happen if they are caught trying to leave. Most of them huddle in fear. A few speak openly against you, suggesting that by killing the drow and cyclopses, you've doomed them to brutal retribution.

The villagers are splitting into two camps: those who want Deanen to take the lead and tell them what to do, and those who prefer to follow Iraz, both because he's the son of the former mayor and because he showed courage and resolve while held prisoner.

Deanen sees little hope for success if the village resists, so he recommends that everyone keep cutting wood and following their orders as before. When more drow show up, they can honestly claim that outsiders were responsible for the killings and hope for mercy.

Iraz wants to fight the slavers. If the PCs are not yet aware of the story of Elmhollow's rebellion and the subsequent death of the mayor and capture of Iraz and Ethaine, Iraz fills them in on the details. He believes that with the PCs' help, Elmhollow can drive off the attackers and win back its freedom. Most villagers, however, are too afraid to get behind this plan, and it should be obvious to the PCs that they are too exhausted and intimidated to be useful in a fight. The exceptions are Iraz and the other prisoners who were freed from the slave pens; they at least want to fight, even if they aren't in any condition to do so, and Iraz in particular wants to free his sister from the slavers.

No one in Elmhollow knows who is paying and commanding the drow beyond his name: Ghorfal. They've surmised that he is building a stronghold downstream (using the timber being logged around Elmhollow) and that that's where he's holding the villagers who've been taken away. No one in Elmhollow has gone downriver or seen this in person, however.

If the PCs stand aside and let the villagers work out their own course of action, the majority back Deanen and choose to beg the drow for mercy. They insist that the PCs leave the village immediately and become more insulting and ungrateful as the discussion goes on.

If the PCs take an active part in the discussion and try to persuade the people to resist, most support the idea but object that they're too weak to fight the drow and cyclopses; that's what got them into this situation to begin with. Those who support the idea of fighting back tend to be those whose family members were taken downstream.

Despite their misgivings, the villagers get behind the idea of opposing the drow if the PCs can do most of the fighting. Otherwise, they don't see any hope in resisting. If the PCs accept this responsibility, Iraz addresses them on behalf of the village:

We realize that this is asking a lot of you, especially since this isn't your fight. Still, we can reward you at least a little. When I had the chance, I hid some of my father's wealth, thinking I might be able to use it to hire mercenaries of my own to fight back against the slavers. Now that you've offered your swords to us, it only seems right to pay you with it.

Iraz offers the PCs a stash of treasure hidden among the heaps of branches that have been lopped off of felled trees. Give the PCs one 13th-level treasure parcel. If you don't already have parcels set up for the players, this is a great time to hand out one of the smaller money parcels, such as 1,800 gp in gems and art objects. This leaves Iraz with nothing more to pay them for further rescue, but he does promise the support of the village if the PCs can defeat Ghorfal and rescue his sister Ethaine.

Developments

If the PCs decide not to seek Ghorfal, it might seem that the adventure is derailed. The neogi master, however, has no intention of allowing a band of adventurers to kill his agents and walk away to spoil his plans. If the PCs do not go downriver and deal with Ghorfal now, he sends mercenaries (more drow and cyclopses; use the forces present in Breaking the First Link if you don't want to create new encounters) who ambush the PCs on their way out of the area and harry them for days to prevent their escape.

In addition, if the PCs do escape, eventually they hear tales about the way Elmhollow was destroyed by savage slavers in retribution for attacks against Ghorfal's mercenaries. They learn that Iraz and Ethaine were executed as examples, the village destroyed, and everyone from the village was captured and either sold into slavery or worked to death by Ghorfal. A good way to bring this sad news is from a heartbroken, injured Elmhollow resident who manages to escape and recognizes the PCs somewhere, publicly accusing them of cowardice and betrayal.

Encounter G1: River War

Encounter Level 11 (3,300 XP)

Setup

1 neogi slaver (S)
1 neogi taskmaster (T)
1 cyclops impaler (C)
2 mezzodemons (M)

Although floating logs downriver from Elmhollow to the chain Bazaar is fast and easy, it does require monitoring. The river connecting the two sites is not particularly wide, and sometimes the logs jam together. To deal with this, a pair of neogi slavers and their servants patrol the river in a small, flat-bottomed barge. As the PCs follow the river toward the Chain Bazaar, they inevitably encounter this patrol.

Perception Check

DC 18: *You hear sounds from downriver: splashing and loud cracking noises, interspaced with high-pitched cries and shrieks.*

If the PCs hear the barge coming, allow them to place themselves how they wish on the map and lay in wait for the neogi. If they don't, place them along the southern edge of the map. Either way, once the PCs are arranged read:

The river is choked with logs, which float slowly and endlessly southward. Ahead you spy a small barge, anchored against the logs and flow of the river. Two horrid creatures crouch on the wooden vessel, long jointed legs bearing up their bloated, spineless bodies. A single, massive cyclops stands on the raft with them, scanning the river with its lone eye. The eel-like barge riders screech commands to two large, bipedal bugs, each walking along the shore and using long tridents to unjam logs that tangle together.

Neogi Slaver (S) **Level 10 Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 500

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
HP 106; **Bloodied** 53
AC 24; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Immune dazed
Speed 8, climb 6 (spider climb)

Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Charm Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm**
Ranged 12; +15 vs. Will; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi slaver as a target (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target treats the slaver as invisible (save ends).

Psychic Shackle (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 3; +15 vs. Will; 3d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi slaver's next turn.

Thrall Goad (minor; encounter)
Close burst 6; targets allies; the target makes a saving throw with a +5 bonus.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20
Str 11 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 21 (+10)

Tactics

The two neogi stay on the barge if possible, using the mezzodemons as frontline troops and the cyclops impaler as a ranged attacker. The cyclops impaler prefers to stay on the far side of the river, using it as a barrier between itself and melee-oriented PCs. If directly threatened in melee, the neogi prefer to call the impaler as a last line of defense rather than to move off the barge.

Neogi Taskmaster (T) **Level 11 Artillery**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 600

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +9; darkvision
HP 112; **Bloodied** 62
AC 23; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 24, **Will** 23
Immune dazed
Speed 8, climb 6 (spider climb)

Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+16 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Pain Bolt (standard action; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 12; +20 vs. Will; 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target takes a -2 penalty to all defenses (save ends).

Command of Return (standard action; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 12; +20 vs. Will; 3d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target must move 2 squares closer to the neogi before the taskmaster's next turn, if possible, or the target takes an additional 3d6 + 2 psychic damage (save ends).

Pain Goad (minor action; encounter)
All non-neogi allies of the neogi taskmaster within 6 squares are at -2 to all defenses and +2 to attack rolls until the beginning of taskmaster's next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20
Str 11 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 21 (+10)

Cyclops Impaler (C)	Level 14 Artillery
Large fey humanoid	XP 1,000

Initiative +10 **Senses** Perception +16; truesight 6
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55
AC 28; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 26
Speed 8

Spear (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.

Spear (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 10/20; +19 vs. AC; 1d10 + 6 damage.

Impaling Volley (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Weapon**
The cyclops impaler makes make 2 ranged spear attacks against different targets no more than 2 squares apart; range 10; +19 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage plus ongoing 5 damage (save ends).

Evil Eye (minor; at will)
Ranged sight; the cyclops impaler gains a +2 bonus to ranged attacks made against the target. It can designate only one target with its *evil eye* at a time.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Elven
Skills Athletics +18

Str 23 (+13)	**Dex** 16 (+10)	**Wis** 19 (+11)
Con 21 (+12)	**Int** 10 (+7)	**Cha** 12 (+8)

Equipment leather armor, 12 spears (in sheaf over back)

2 Mezzodemons (M)	Level 11 Soldier
Large elemental humanoid (demon)	XP 600 each

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 113; **Bloodied** 56
AC 27; **Fortitude** 25, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Resist 20 (points), 10 variable (2/encounter; see *Monster Manual*, page 282)
Speed 6

Trident (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires trident; reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage.

Skewering Tines (standard; at will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 1d8 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 damage and the target is restrained (save ends both). While the target is restrained, the mezzodemon can't make trident attacks.

Poison Breath (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Poison**
Close blast 3; targets enemies; +16 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 3 poison damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends).

Alignment Chaotic **Languages** Abyssal
Skills Intimidate +11

Str 20 (+10)	**Dex** 15 (+7)	**Wis** 16 (+8)
Con 17 (+8)	**Int** 10 (+5)	**Cha** 13 (+6)

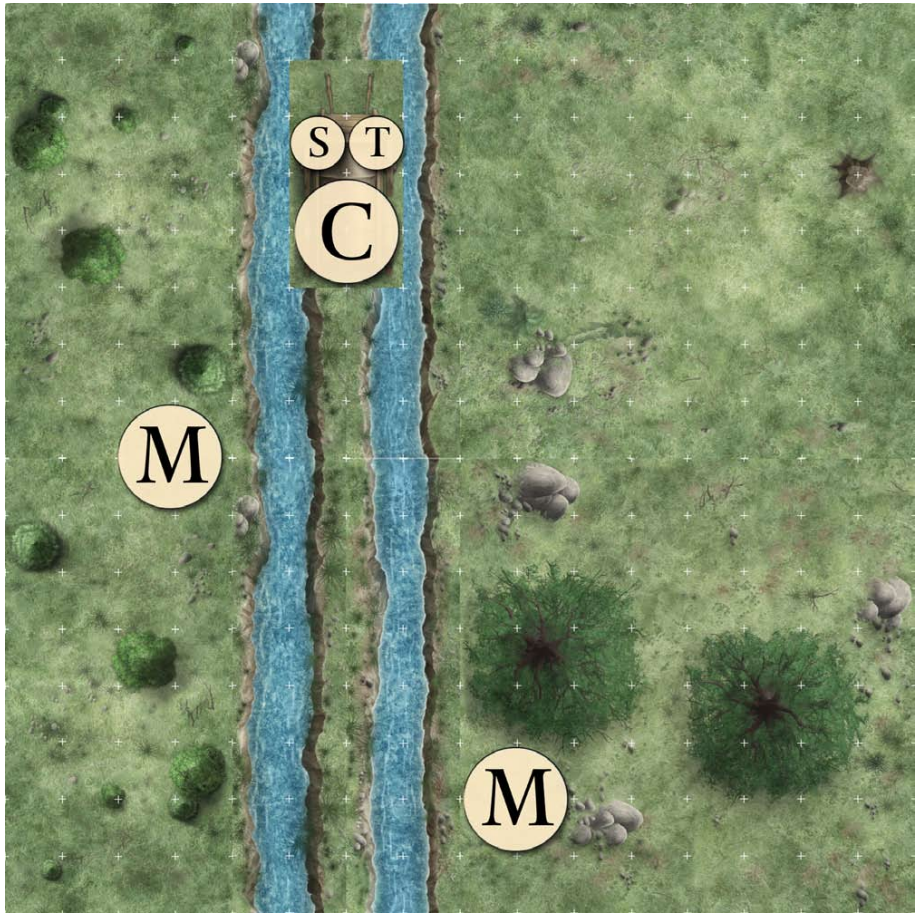
Equipment trident

Features of the Area

River: Although represented on the map as two parallel rivers, this is in fact one waterway 4 squares wide. The center of the river is choked with logs jammed together. Along the banks, squares containing water should be treated as entirely water. Down the center of the river, squares containing ground should be treated as entirely logs. Characters can walk on the logs as an unstable surface (DC 20 Acrobatics check to maintain balance). A failed check results in the character being dumped into the closest river square.

A character in the river must make an Athletics check to swim. The river counts as rough water, requiring a DC 15 Athletics check to move through. Failing the Athletics check by 5 means that a log strikes that character for 1d10 damage. Anyone in the river automatically drifts 2 squares downriver (north) at the end of the character's turn, unless the character is holding onto the logs, the barge, or the bank with at least one hand. (The barge and the logs are also drifting downstream but slowly enough that their motion isn't significant in the battle.)

Barge: The small neogi barge is 2 squares wide and 3 squares long. It is represented by a wagon on the map (a wagon tile is available in the *Ruins of the Wild*™ set of *Dungeon Tiles* used to build the river). It is jammed in among the logs and can't maneuver relative to them within this encounter.



Developments

If the cyclops is killed and one or more neogi is bloodied, the neogi send any surviving mezzodemon toward the Chain Bazaar to warn Ghorfal that they are under attack. If both neogi and the cyclops are killed, any remaining mezzodemon flees.

Encounter G2: Feeding Time

Encounter Level 13 (4,300 XP)

Setup

3 neogi spawn swarms (S)
1 bone naga (N)

The cries of people in panic echo down from the fortification's wall, followed quickly by loud hissing and high-pitched shrieking. By the base of the wall, on the outside, you can see several bushes begin to thrash wildly. A long, serpentine figure coils around one and looks down, as if gazing into a pit. Some of the panicked cries become clear screams for help, and others are curses directed at someone named "Mother."

The prisoners are hanging from the bushes lining the pit; though previously unconscious, they have just awoken to discover their position. Three neogi larva swarms are in the pit, trying to climb out of it, and an ancient bone naga watches protectively. One of the prisoners is Ethaine, who begins to yell at the bone naga—calling it "Mother"—that she'll see it in the Abyss.

Tactics

The neogi spawn swarms have no tactics. They are stuck at the bottom of the pit and attack anything they can reach other than fellow neogi or Mother. If any PCs are in the pit, the neogi attack them in favor of the prisoners (who are too thin to smell as tasty). The neogi can't get out, and they never stop fighting to reach something to eat. If a body is left in the pit with one or more surviving neogi spawn swarms, it is entirely devoured within 10 minutes.

3 Neogi Spawn Swarms (S) Level 10 Brute
Medium aberrant magical beast (swarm) XP 500 each

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
Swarm Attack aura 1; each enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes 5 poison damage.
HP 131; **Bloodied** 65; see also *psychic scream*
AC 23; **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 22
Immune dazed; **Resist** half damage from melee and ranged attacks; **Vulnerable** 10 against close and area attacks
Speed 6, climb 6 (spider climb)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+13 vs. AC; 2d6 + 4 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is also slowed (save ends).

↯ **Psychic Scream** (when first bloodied and again when the neogi spawn swarm drops to 0 hit points) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +11 vs. Will; 2d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech
Str 18 (+9) **Dex** 19 (+9) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 21 (+10) **Int** 5 (+2) **Cha** 21 (+10)

"Mother," Bone Naga (N) Level 16 Elite Controller
Large immortal magical beast (undead) XP 2,800

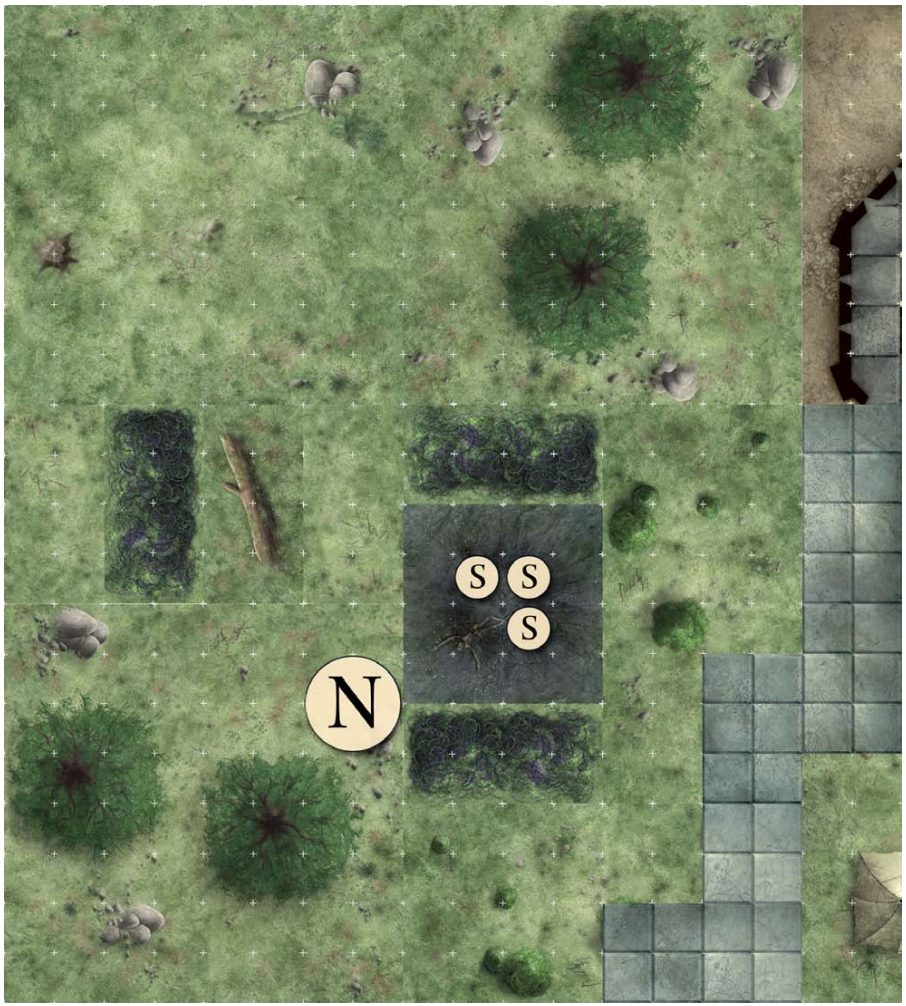
Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Death Rattle (Necrotic) aura 2; enemies that start their turn in the aura are dazed
HP 328; **Bloodied** 164
AC 32; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 7
Action Points 1

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Reach 2; +20 vs. AC; 2d4 + 6 damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target is weakened (save ends).

↯ **Death Sway** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Close burst 3; blind creatures are immune; +21 vs. Will; the target is dazed (save ends). If the target is already dazed, it takes 2d6 + 6 necrotic damage instead.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Draconic, Supernal
Skills Arcana +18, History +18, Insight +18, Religion +18
Str 22 (+14) **Dex** 16 (+11) **Wis** 20 (+13)
Con 28 (+17) **Int** 20 (+13) **Cha** 26 (+16)

Mother is an ancient undead guardian, one of the last treasures of the Bloody Chain clan, and has been protecting the clan's young for generations. Mother prevents the PCs from reaching the pit if possible; otherwise, it does its best to move close to the most PCs possible, hoping to use its *death rattle* and *death sway*. It does not go into the pit unless it has no other way to attack a PC.



Developments

Reinforcements are unlikely to arrive on their own: Combat doesn't attract much attention because the cries of prisoners being eaten (and fighting back) are expected, and Mother does not leave the neogi spawn while any threat is present. If, however, the PCs are spotted at any time during the encounter and they leave to return later, Mother reports them. When the PCs do return, two cyclops guards are present as well (the same as those found in Breaking the First Link, page 13).

Rottart, Vance, and Kire are all prisoners who have been present for weeks at the Chain Bazaar (human male, Diplomacy +5, Insight +5). They are too weak to do more than follow if led, and they make no effort to contribute to the PCs' efforts. Ethaine Stoneshanks (human female, Diplomacy +9, Insight +7) is just as weak, but she refuses to give up without making an effort. She spits invective at Mother for as long as she can, directs PCs to aid prisoner who are about to die, and generally shouts encouragement and warnings to the PCs.

If rescued, Ethaine offers further guidance to the PCs. She helped build the wall of the Chain Bazaar and managed to conceal a weak point while doing so: One of the walls has a space at the base where a Medium creature can slip through. This point is near Ghorfal's tent and concealed behind a bush that has not yet been cleared from the fortress's courtyard. Ethaine offers to show it to the PCs; it could enable them to take Ghorfal by surprise and avoid fighting their way through a tower entrance. Ethaine also assures the PCs that the Chain Bazaar is nearly undefended. Although a few neogi guard the walls and Ghorfal is inside, most of his agents and clan members are out drumming up contracts for his unfinished auction block.

Ethaine is aware of Ghorfal's long-term plans and the fact that he has dozens of orders for slaves already placed with various groups, many of which are due to come here in the next few weeks. She warns the PCs that if Ghorfal is not stopped, he might turn the fledgling Chain Bazaar into a major center for slave trading or even a base for the eventual conquest of the region

Features of the Area

Prisoners: Four prisoners are held here: Rottart, Vance, Kire, and Ethaine Stoneshanks. Each is suspended above the bottom of the pit by leather thongs tied to their wrists and to the bushes surrounding the pit. Unless rescued, the prisoners begin dropping into the pit beginning at the end of the second round of the encounter, as the leather thongs or the weak bushes break under the prisoners' weight and struggles. One prisoner drops at the end of every even-numbered round in the order listed above. Once in the pit, a prisoner is wounded by one attack, unconscious after two, and dies if attacked a third time. Temporary hit points granted by a PC allow a wounded or unconscious prisoner to survive one additional attack, but the prisoners have no healing surges to take advantage of offered healing.

Encounter G3: Ghorfal the Voracious

Encounter Level 15 (6,200 XP)

Setup

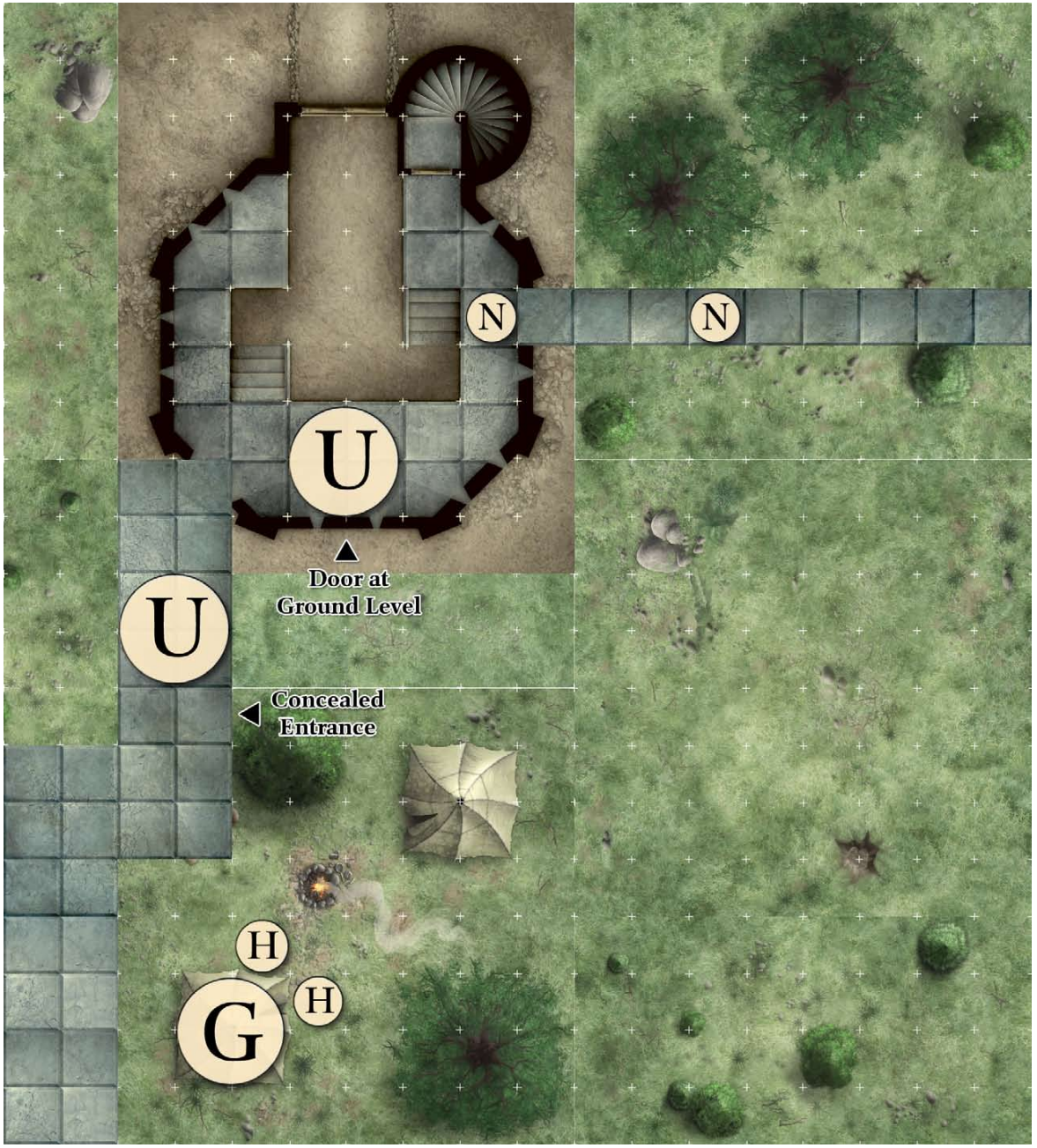
Ghorfal the Voracious (G)
2 neogi slavers (N)
2 umber hulks (U)
2 bog hags (H)

Hulking insectoid creatures walk along the tops of the towers, and skittering noises suggest that other creatures accompany or check on the huge, umber brutes occasionally. Though the walls are crude, they are built of stout timbers topped with a walkway. From within the walls, the moans and cries of exhausted slaves is audible, partially drowning out all other sounds.

Once the PCs have either bypassed the walls and tower (possible with Ethaine Stoneshanks' help) or fought their way through, read:

The massive creature halfway in one of the tents is the biggest of these spider-legged abominations you've seen yet. Its bulk seems impossibly bloated, but its thick spider legs move it with ease if not speed. The creature's skin is slimier than others of its kind, and its underside undulates and ripples as though constantly agitated from within. Two young women of particularly fine features are bound at its feet, lying motionless on their sides as if displayed as objects of art.

Once Ghorfal sees the PCs, it screams the command "Kill them!" in Deep Speech.



Ghorfal the Voracious **Level 16 Controller**
Neogi Great Old Master (G)
Large aberrant magical beast XP 1,400

Initiative +9 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
Thrall Field aura 1; each enemy within the aura takes a -4 penalty to saving throws.
HP 157; **Bloodied** 78; see also *larva burst*
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Immune dazed
Speed 6, climb 4 (spider climb)

⊕ **Scythe Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage, and the target is knocked prone.

Enslaving Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm, Psychic**
Ranged 12; +20 vs. Will; 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi great old master as a target. *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is dominated (save ends). *Third Failed Saving Throw:* If the target is bloodied, it is dominated until it takes an extended rest.

Larva Burst (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Zone**
Close burst 2; targets enemies; +20 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 5 damage, and the target is slowed (save ends). *Effect:* The burst creates a zone of squirming grubs and larvae that lasts until the end of the encounter. The zone is difficult terrain.

Psychic Shackle (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 4; +20 vs. Will; 3d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi great old master's next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20
Str 20 (+13) **Dex** 14 (+10) **Wis** 18 (+12)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 22 (+14) **Cha** 24 (+15)

Tactics

The neogi try to keep the umber hulks between the PCs and any other target. The umber hulks make *confusing gaze* attacks every turn, and they are directed to grab any PC taking a defensive or leadership role. The neogi slavers stay close to the umber hulks even if this puts them at risk: They focus their use of *charm bolts* on spellcasters, and they use their *thrall goad* powers any time an umber hulk is disabled by a power a saving throw can end.

2 Umber Hulks (U) **Level 12 Elite Soldier**
Large natural magical beast XP 1,400 each

Initiative +11 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision, tremorsense 5
HP 248; **Bloodied** 124
AC 30; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 27
Saving Throws +2
Speed 5, burrow 2 (tunneling)
Action Point 1

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage.

Grabbing Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The umber hulk makes two claw attacks. If both claw attacks hit the same target, the target is grabbed (until escape). A grabbed target takes ongoing 10 damage from the umber hulk's mandibles until it escapes. The umber hulk cannot make any other attacks while grabbing a creature.

Confusing Gaze (minor, 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Gaze, Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +16 vs. Will; the target slides 5 squares and is dazed (save ends).

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** –
Str 26 (+14) **Dex** 16 (+9) **Wis** 14 (+8)
Con 20 (+11) **Int** 5 (+3) **Cha** 11 (+6)

Ghorfal targets one PC with his *enslaving bolt* as many times as possible, hoping to dominate a target to use against other enemies. If a target is bloodied before Ghorfal manages to dominate someone, the bloodied target becomes his new *enslaving bolt* recipient. Once bloodied, Ghorfal gives up on *enslaving bolt* and uses his *psychic shackle* when available; when it hasn't recharged, he resorts to *scythe claw*.

The bog hags lie at Ghorfal's feet, taking the forms of a beautiful young eladrin woman and a comely half-elf woman, both in apparent bondage. As long as no neogi or umber hulk has been bloodied, they stay in that form until someone comes to rescue them,

2 Neogi Slavers (N) **Level 10 Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 500 each

Initiative +7 **Senses** Perception +8; darkvision
HP 106; **Bloodied** 53
AC 24; **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 23
Immune dazed
Speed 8, climb 6 (spider climb)

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
+14 vs. AC; 1d6 + 3 damage, and ongoing 5 poison damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Charm Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm**
Ranged 12; +15 vs. Will; the target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that include the neogi slaver as a target (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target treats the slaver as invisible (save ends).

Psychic Shackle (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 3; +15 vs. Will; 3d6 + 2 psychic damage, and the target is dazed until the start of the neogi slaver's next turn.

Thrall Goad (minor; encounter)
Close burst 6; targets allies; the target makes a saving throw with a +5 bonus.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 12
Skills Bluff +20, Diplomacy +20, Insight +18, Intimidate +20
Str 11 (+5) **Dex** 14 (+7) **Wis** 17 (+8)
Con 18 (+9) **Int** 19 (+9) **Cha** 21 (+10)

when they unleash their *rending claws*. Once they have revealed their true forms, they maneuver to charge at any lone PC, shifting away after each attack. If possible, they avoid ever being flanked or stuck adjacent to a melee combatant. Both focus on any target that is causing significant damage to Ghorfal.

No creature flees if Ghorfal is still alive. Once Ghorfal is dead, the bog hags flee if bloodied, and the umber hulks flee if all the neogi are unconscious or dead. The neogi slavers fight to the death even if Ghorfal is killed.

2 Bog Hags (H)		Level 10 Skirmisher
Medium fey humanoid (aquatic)		XP 500
Initiative +11	**Senses** Perception +7; low-light vision	
Unwholesome Presence aura 3; enemies in the aura gain only half the normal hit points from spending healing surges.		
HP 107; **Bloodied** 53; see also *rending claws*		
AC 24; **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 19		
Speed 8 (swamp walk), swim 8		
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)		
+15 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 damage.		
⸸ **Rending Claws** (standard; recharges when first bloodied)		
The bog hag makes two claw attacks against the same target; if both claws hit, the hag deals an extra 5 damage to the target.		
Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**		
A bog hag can alter its physical form to appear as a beautiful young female elf, half-elf, eladrin, or human (see Change Shape, page 280).		
Evasive Charge		
The bog hag shifts 2 squares after charging.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Elven	
Skills Intimidate +12, Nature +12, Stealth +14		
Str 22 (+11)	**Dex** 18 (+9)	**Wis** 15 (+7)
Con 19 (+9)	**Int** 12 (+6)	**Cha** 14 (+7)

Developments

Few additional residents are within the Chain Bazaar currently, but if this fight becomes too easy, you can add neogi slavers and taskmasters along with cyclops, drow, or umber hulk servants and mercenaries. All of these can appear as reinforcements from towers or as returning agents of Ghorfal. If any mezzodemons escaped the River War encounter, they should arrive as reinforcements to Ghorfal after two rounds.

Conclusion

With Ghorfal dead, the Chain Bazaar will be abandoned. No other member of the Bloody Chain clan has the power or contacts to create a major slave market out of nothing. Unless the simple wall-and-tower fort is destroyed, it will be taken over by other forces in the area, which might cause future problems for the people of Elmhollow. No future inhabitant, however, is likely to do as much harm as the Blood Chain clan could have if the Chain Bazaar had become the center of the slave trade that Ghorfal envisioned. Unable to fulfill their current contracts, the remaining neogi soon lose any power to hire mercenaries or enslave towns on their own.

This does not mean slavery ends in the region. Elmhollow allowed slavery before Ghorfal came, and unless the PCs argue against it, slavery becomes a way of life again. Iraz and Ethaine are opposed to the practice, but unless the PCs work to place those two in power (perhaps aiding them in commanding the Chain Bazaar as their own stronghold), the Stoneshanks siblings won't be able to change the tide of their society.

Nor is this likely to be the last the PCs hear of the Bloody Chain. Though their last great old master is dead, a few neogi slavers belonging to the clan still exist, currently away on trips to establish a trade route. They cannot make that a reality without Ghorfal's aid, especially with the Chain Bazaar incomplete, but not all their work is lost. Those neogi now have contacts of their own, and they might be able to become agents of some other force. A city of drow or stronghold of giants could well employ the remaining Bloody Chain neogi to become their slave traders and wandering merchants. Of course, those neogi never forget the adventurers who forced them to become little more than servants, and they look for every opportunity to harass the PCs in the future.

About the Author

Owen K.C. Stephens is a freelance RPG writer whose recent work for Wizards of the Coast includes *Adventurer's Vault, Dragon Magic, Scum and Villainy,* and *The Force Unleashed Campaign Guide.*

A Tyranny of Souls

By Robert J. Schwalb

An adventure for 19th-level characters

illustrations by William O'Connor and Kekai Kotaki
cartography by Robert Lazzaretti & Mike Schley

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Listen!

The darkest hour is upon us, but we have no need to fear and no reason for anguish. It has been foretold that our hero will return. Her blade will shine like a thousand stars, and our enemies will cower in its brilliant light. Her voice will ring with the shouts of a thousand warriors, and our enemies will wail and gnash their teeth with fear. And her anger will burn like a thousand suns, and our enemies will be as cinders before her intolerable wrath. It has been foretold that she who broke our chains will come forth once again and lead us to glory and conquest, and in her name we will build an empire to span all worlds, giving no shelter, no succor, and no mercy to those who oppose us. It has been foretold and the time is near. Take heart warrior—Gith has returned, and our ultimate victory is at hand!

Tiamat seized the githyanki city and bleeds it dry to supply her armies with arms, soldiers, and other resources. In doing so, she broke the ancient pact between the githyanki and red dragons, and she inadvertently loosed Gith's soul from the Nine Hells to return to her people once more. Masquerading as Vlaakith reborn, Gith seeks out the Coalition to forge a temporary alliance and hopes to join forces to remove Tiamat from Tu'narath and withdraw the githyanki from the war.

THE QUESTS

In "A Tyranny of Souls," the PCs journey to Citadel Mercane only to discover their contacts dead. From there, the adventurers push on to Tu'narath, where they must rescue the Separatists' leader, negotiate an alliance, and defeat Emperor Zetch'r'r to force Tiamat out of the ancient githyanki city.

Minor Quest—Contact the Separatists
The adventurers are sent to Citadel Mercane to meet with the Separatists' representatives. Finding the representatives murdered, the characters must discover another way to make contact with these rebel githyanki even if this means traveling to Tu'narath.

Reward: 2,400 XP.

Minor Quest—Infiltrate Tu'narath
The githyanki guard their infamous city's location, so travelers seeking out this bastion must find a route to the city and, once there, find a way through the cordon.

Reward: 2,400 XP.

Minor Quest—Rescue Vlaakith
When the characters make contact with the githyanki rebels, they learn the movement is in shambles since the emperor's soldiers captured their leader. The characters must rescue Vlaakith if the Separatists would have a chance to retake the city from Tiamat.

Reward: 2,400 XP.

Minor Quest—Defeat the Emperor
For the Separatists to take command of the city, the emperor must lose control over the dragons. The only way this can happen is if he is defeated and the *scepter of Ephelomon*—the pact's physical representation—is given to Vlaakith.

Reward: 2,800 XP.

Major Quest—The Githyanki Withdraw from the War
The PCs can negotiate with the Separatists to get them to withdraw from the war and in doing so deliver a terrible setback to Tiamat's plans.

Reward: 14,000 XP.

Bonus: +2,400 XP if the characters secure a 1,000-year reprieve.

Bonus: +2,800 XP if the characters secure an alliance.

"A Tyranny of Souls" is an adventure for five 19th-level characters. By its end, the player characters should be 21st level. With some adaptation, however, you can run this adventure as a stand-alone scenario or as part of your own campaign.

BACKGROUND

Tiamat casts a dark shadow across the ancient githyanki city of Tu'narath, but the city is no stranger to evil's machinations. Having endured the Lich-Queen's thousand-year reign, the city has witnessed astonishing wickedness. All was to have changed with Vlaakith's assassination, but the vacuum she created plunged the city into turmoil, with military commanders and pretenders all vying for her throne. When a leader emerged to right its course, though, it would lead the githyanki into greater darkness in Tiamat's thrall.

The githyanki have never knelt to a god, but desperate times demand desperate actions. The Lich-Queen's death threatened to tear Tu'narath apart, and the githyanki were no closer to correcting their course. Zetch'r'r had a strong claim to the throne, but his radical views and his involvement in Vlaakith's death made him unpopular with the conservative factions. While he argued and fought, less worthy ascendants each put forward their own claims.

Zetch'r'r lacked sufficient strength to take the city by force, but each day he delayed, the damage and violence escalated. Like Gith so long ago, Zetch'r'r turned to Tiamat for aid. The dark goddess, with plans of her own, proved a willing ally. She had long coveted greater influence over the githyanki, but she saw the ancient pact as an obstacle. She offered

to help, promising to give Zetch'r'r full control over the dragons in the city in exchange for his unswerving loyalty and fealty. Zetch'r'r knelt, and his rise to power was assured.

Bolstered by red dragons, dragonspawn, and devil mercenaries, Zetch'r'r dashed his enemies and crushed all opposition in a single week. Amid the ruins of Vlaakith's old palace, Tiamat's dark priests crowned Zetch'r'r emperor and the new tyrant declared his bold plans for his people, including a renewed commitment to the crusade against the mind flayers and a new peace with their estranged kin, the githzerai. His promises amounted to little, for Tiamat had other plans.

The Dark Lady needed soldiers for her armies, weapons for her troops, and a base to launch new attacks against her enemies. Tu'narath provided all these things. Zetch'r'r's goals stood in Tiamat's way, and so, by her decree, the githyanki would abandon their campaign against the mind flayers and refocus their efforts to combat Tiamat's foes. Zetch'r'r had no choice but to accept his mistress's commands, and thus was Tu'narath's new course set.

What neither Tiamat nor Zetch'r'r realized was that by abandoning the Eternal Crusade, they rendered the ancient compact between the githyanki and the red dragons void. Without the pact, Gith, who's soul long-languished in Dispater's cells in the Nine Hells, was free to find the oblivion long-owed her in the Shadowfell, but this ancient hero was not finished yet.

Adventure Synopsis

A few days before the adventure begins, a githyanki envoy representing the Separatists presented himself before the Coalition to gauge their interests in forming a short-term alliance. The representative explained that not all githyanki are so eager to die for Tiamat, and many see their service to the dark goddess as slavery. The envoy invites the Coalition to send representatives to Citadel Mercane, where they can bargain on neutral ground, free from Tiamat's ever-present eyes. Although the Coalition suspects a trap, the opportunity to weaken Tiamat's armies is too good to pass up. The adventurers, who have proved capable allies, are chosen to serve as ambassadors and negotiate the terms on the Coalition's behalf.

The heroes make the journey to Citadel Mercane, but they soon discover their contacts are missing or dead. Meeting up with a possible ally, a disguised raavasta (see *Manual of the Planes*™, page 136), to help navigate the trade center, the PCs learn the Separatists are active in Tu'narath and that they must travel there and contact them if they would get them to withdraw from the war.

In the githyanki city, the PCs learn the emperor is wise to their intent and has moved to capture and kill many Separatist leaders, plus he has traps in place for the adventurers. They eventually encounter a Separatist agent who informs them that Vlaakith, their leader, was taken prisoner and is held at the Fortress of Three Sorrows. By freeing her, the PCs can demonstrate their goodwill and also give the rebel faction renewed hope and drive to fight against Tiamat's agents.

The characters travel to the floating fortress, battle through its defenses, and fight their way to Vlaakith's "cell." There, they learn from the aspect of Dispater, who has come to steal back the soul inhabiting her body, that the legendary warrior Gith possesses the young githyanki woman.

Once the characters free her and restore Vlaakith to the Separatists, they can engage in the negotiations for which they were sent. The Separatists agree to withdraw the githyanki from Tiamat's war, but admit their promises are worthless as long as Zetch'r'r is in power. The githyanki ask the PCs to infiltrate his palace, defeat the usurper, and recover the *scepter of Ephelomon*. Meanwhile, the Separatists will attack Tiamat's garrisons and retake the city. The adventure concludes in a deadly battle against the emperor and his red dragon cohort in his personal chambers, while battles rage in the skies above and in the city streets. If the PCs succeed, Tu'narath becomes free from Tiamat and the githyanki can once more follow their own destinies. If they fail, there will be no stopping Tiamat's wrath.

Managing the Adventure

Although "A Tyranny of Souls" has a straightforward plot, the players have several choices and options for completing the various parts, allowing the adventure to unfold in an organic fashion. Giving meaningful choices means the PCs might skip over some encounters, and in doing so, they might lag behind in XP or miss out on important treasure. Many encounters provided adaptation entries to help you repurpose them for later use in the adventure. Alternatively, you can use the smaller sample encounters to offer additional challenges. Just move the treasure the characters missed to these improvised combats. Shifting encounters helps you create the illusion of success from cleverness without diminishing the XP and treasure the characters ought to earn.

Preparing for Adventure

"A Tyranny of Souls" takes the adventurers into the Astral Sea. The characters begin by exploring Citadel Mercane, an ancient trade center built within the heart of a crimson mountain, where they hope to meet with the Separatists' agents. From the citadel, the characters travel across the Astral Sea to Tu'narath. Once there, the PCs might explore the Merchant District, attack a floating fortress, and ultimately assault the Chromatic Bastion, seat of Zetch'r'r's power.

What You Need to Play

Aside from the core rulebooks, "A Tyranny of Souls" references information from three other sources. "Tu'narath, City of Death" in *Dragon® Magazine* #377 provides a comprehensive history and overview of the githyanki and their city. The *Manual of the Planes* provides extensive information on the Astral Sea and its inhabitants and should prove a useful resource for adding more detail than given in this adventure. Finally, a few tactical encounters feature vehicles. While the key information you need to use vehicles is included in an appendix, *Adventurer's Vault™* provides the complete rules.

Several tactical encounters involve challenging environments, mounts, and three-dimensional combat. Be sure to review "Movement in Three Dimensions, Mounted Combat, and Flying" in the *Dungeon Master's Guide®* (pages 45–48) before running this adventure.

Using Tactical Encounters

Each encounter includes several common elements, as described below.

Encounter Level

Each tactical encounter assumes a group of five player characters. An encounter of average difficulty is one where the encounter level is equal to the level of the party. Encounters that are 1 or 2 levels lower than the party are easy encounters, while encounters that are 2 or more levels higher than the party are difficult encounters.

For overcoming an encounter, a group earns the XP value noted beside the encounter level. This amount should be divided by the number of group members, with an equal amount awarded to each character.

Setup

This section of a tactical encounter provides you with the basic parameters of the encounter. It gives you a key to the monsters in the encounter so you can locate them on the tactical map, then provides context or background information. The map of each encounter area indicates where the monsters are located when the encounter begins. The setup section also describes what monsters are doing and how they react when the PCs arrive.

Some encounters include monsters that are hidden or that do not appear until later in combat. Do not place those monsters on the map unless at least one PC has succeeded on the Perception check to notice them, or when they enter combat.

Read-Aloud Text

Read-aloud text provides information about what the characters can see and are aware of. You do not have to read it word for word. Especially where read-aloud text is provided in a question-and-answer format, feel free to paraphrase and use your own words when describing the information presented. Use read-aloud text wisely. It is written for the most common approach to a particular situation, but the PCs' actions might require you to alter the information in any number of ways.

Adapting the Adventure

As written, "A Tyranny of Souls" is for five characters at 19th level. If the characters are of slightly higher level, you might cut an encounter or two, and you might also cut treasure parcels if the PCs have already attained them during a previous adventure. If the characters are below 19th level, you can use the additional encounters provided in the text to catch up the adventurers as needed.

Parties with four or fewer player characters need more opportunities to take extended rests, so you might make some combats easier or spread them out. You might also reduce the complexities of skill challenges since there are fewer participants.

For larger parties, simply add additional creatures or hazards to combats using the guidelines presented in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Larger parties might need fewer extended rests and so you can tighten the plot to move the characters from one scene to the next. As well, skill challenges will become easier for larger groups, so consider increasing the complexities by 1 or more depending on the party's size.

Monster Statistics

Encounters include statistics blocks for each monster type present in the encounter. If more than one monster of a particular kind is present, the statistics block indicates how many creatures can be found.

What Is an Adventure Path?

An adventure path is a connected series of adventures that comprises an entire D&D® campaign, from the heroes' humble beginnings at 1st level to their epic triumphs at the pinnacle of level 30. These adventures cover all three tiers of play: heroic, paragon, and epic. Each tier is covered by roughly six adventures, meaning that the entire adventure path consist of eighteen adventures. Each adventure covers between one and three levels, but you can also have the PCs undertake side quests to help supplement XP. This assures that the PCs are the correct level to tackle each adventure.

This adventure path is meant to be a complete D&D campaign. That means we're making some assumptions about the history and mythology of the world as the adventures progress, such as Queen Vlaakith's death (an event we've adopted from the adventure "The Lich Queen's Beloved" in *Dungeon Magazine* #100). As the adventure path moves into the epic tier, you can look forward to the appearance of some classic heroes and villains from D&D history, as well as great ideas from past issues of *Dungeon Magazine* and other sources.

Treasure

The adventure uses the "parcel" technique of treasure distribution as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. Use the following 20 treasure parcels. When determining which magic items are present, consult your players' wish lists. If an item is appropriate for a monster to use in an encounter, feel free to let it, noting the item's features and making changes to the stat-block as needed.

Parcel 1: _____, Magic item, level 23.
Parcel 2: _____, Magic item, level 22.
Parcel 3: _____, Magic item, level 21.
Parcel 4: _____, Magic item, level 20.
Parcel 5: _____, 6 astral diamonds.
Parcel 6: _____, 2 *gems of valor* (*Adventurer's Vault* 191), 3 *potions of vigor* (level 19, *Adventurer's Vault* 189), *talisman of good fortune* (*Adventurer's Vault* 168), and 4,400 gp worth of residuum.
Parcel 7: _____, 3 astral diamonds, 50 pp.
Parcel 8: _____, 300 pp and 5 *potions of vitality.*
Parcel 9: _____, Ritual scroll of Planar Portal and 1,000 gp of residuum.
Parcel 10: _____, *Trethrix's palanquin* (page 60), fine clothing worth 1,200 gp, and a pouch containing 70 pp.
Parcel 11: _____, Magic item, level 24.
Parcel 12: _____, Magic item, level 23.
Parcel 13: _____, Magic item, level 22.
Parcel 14: _____, Magic item, level 21.
Parcel 15: _____, 600 pp and two diamonds worth 5,000 gp each.
Parcel 16: _____, 16,000 gp; a silvery cloak spun from astral thread, a mithral mirror, and golden idol of Tiamat, each valued at 15,000 gp.
Parcel 17: _____, 400 pp and 2 frozen *potions of vitality* (can't be used until 5 minutes after being removed from the chamber).
Parcel 18: _____, 8 gems worth 5,000 gp each and two fire opals worth 1,000 gp each.
Parcel 19: _____, 21,000 gp.
Parcel 20: _____, *astral skiff* and 1,000 gp.

Tactics

This entry describes special actions the monsters take to defeat the adventurers. Sometimes this means the monsters take advantage of special features of the area or make use of special powers or equipment.

Map

Each encounter includes a map keyed with the initial locations of each monster. The map also indicates the location of any special features of the area.

Features of the Area

This section describes special features noted on the map. If the location has items or areas of interest with which the characters can interact, those features are described here. Look here to see if a door is out of the ordinary, if an altar has a secret compartment, and the like.

Starting the Adventure

The adventure begins not long after the adventurers complete "Garaitha's Anvil," long enough for them to recover, but before the characters have a chance to spend their gold and resupply. The initial meeting with the githyanki envoy happens off-stage (though it doesn't have to), and once the Coalition comes to a decision about how to respond to the invitation, Amyria turns to her friends and allies: the adventurers. The following encounter occurs wherever the PCs are resting between adventures.

Read the following aloud, and break it up as needed if the players wish to interject a comment or question.

Amyria appears in a flash of light. Two human mages in gray robes and carrying staffs accompany her. She looks around to gain her bearings, and then toward you. She smiles, but there's no joy in it and her eyes are hard, fierce, and filled with worry.

"Friends, I apologize for dropping in unexpected, but events force my hand. Again, I'm afraid, the Coalition needs your aid. You know the threat the githyanki pose: They are integral to the Dark Lady's plans. We have an opportunity to change this and deliver a terrible blow to the Chromatic Dragon if you are willing.

"A few days ago, a githyanki envoy came before the Coalition with an offer. He represented the Separatists, a rebel faction within Tu'narath, the githyanki's greatest city. What he described was troubling: Tiamat rules through a puppet emperor named Zetch'r'r and he uses the city poorly, draining it of resources to supply Tiamat's war machine.

"He admitted his people have no love for us, but he also explained this war was not of their making and has proved too costly to continue.

"Friends, they want an alliance! Yes, it seems suspect, a trap perhaps, but can we afford to turn away new allies in our time of need?"

"We discussed the matter and we have agreed to send envoys of our own to meet with their representatives. With the recent troubles, and your incomparable successes, we turn to you for aid. We want you to negotiate an alliance with these rebels and get the githyanki out of this war. If we can achieve this, our victory might very well be at hand."

Amyria stops here and lets the PCs ask questions, argue, and say whatever they want. She knows this is a risky venture, but she believes the adventurers are up to the task, given their record. Assuming they agree, she explains what the PCs need to do.

"The githyanki want to meet on neutral ground. Their representatives will not meet here, and we're not willing to step into the viper's nest of Tu'narath. We agreed to meet at the Citadel Mercane, a trade depot in the Astral Sea. There, you will negotiate for an alliance. Your aim is to get the githyanki to withdraw from the war. We have faith in you and your wisdom, so you can bargain with the Coalition's full authority. If their offer is genuine, failure is no option. Should the negotiations unravel, I don't know that we can win this."

Amyria knows little else, although the PCs are to ask for Rel'thrik at the Dreaming Spire in the citadel. She has learned that Citadel Mercane was raised by planar merchants centuries ago, but inner strife and upheavals have seen the power shift to the Society of Seven Diamonds, a cabal of ruthless merchants and traders. The Citadel has a cosmopolitan environment, so the adventurers should have little trouble blending in and picking up whatever supplies they need. Amyria warns the characters that Tiamat has operatives everywhere and the adventurers should be watchful for spies and assassins.

When the characters are ready, the two mages begin the ritual's performance. It takes 10 minutes, and when they complete it, a shimmering opening appears in the middle of the circle they inscribed on the floor. When all the characters step through, proceed to Blood Mountain.

Alternate Hooks

Even if you are not running "A Tyranny of Souls" as part of the Scales of War adventure path, you can still use the adventure as a stand-alone scenario. Consider any of the following adventure hooks.

Ancient Evil

Kastya Zurityh-Movya, a githyanki lich and expatriate hiding in the Shadowfell, has long harbored a grudge against his people and hungers for revenge against Vlaakith. With the recent troubles bubbling up from Tiamat's influence in the city, Kastya senses an opportunity. Sending his lieutenant Iliss Githom-Vaas to recruit the PCs residing in Gloomwrought, he asks them to negotiate an alliance with the new Vlaakith to see to his return to the city and secure a place in her new regime. The PCs might agree given that a change in power would ultimately weaken the githyanki threat, but they might also secure a thousand-year reprieve from the githyanki in which these planar raiders would not attack their world for a specified time.

Chaos Reigns

While taking some well-deserved downtime in Sigil (or elsewhere), the heroes are approached by a coalition of githzerai and Xaositects—a faction devoted to Chaos. The coalition has learned that Gith has escaped the Nine Hells and now leads a Separatist faction within Tu'narath. The githzerai believe Gith's return could fracture and weaken the githyanki, while the Xaositects simply want to spread unrest. To these ends, the coalition recruits the PCs to negotiate an alliance with the Separatists and foment a bloody civil war.

The One in the Void

When Vlaakith CLVII worked to steal the divine spark residing within the One in the Void (see "The Lich Queen's Beloved" in *Dungeon Magazine* #100), she inadvertently stirred the corpse's consciousness. The dead god now dreams, and in its visions it sees a disturbing future, one in which the Far Realm spills into the mortal world and unravels the cosmos. Believing the githyanki are vital to combating the impending mind flayer empire that will begin the invasion, the dead god scours the natural world for heroes to restore the githyanki to their proper purpose and release them from Tiamat's clutches. Plagued with disturbing visions and dreams, the PCs travel to Tu'narath and in doing so learn of Tiamat's plot and the Separatist movement to oust her puppet from the githyanki throne. If the PCs help the Separatists, they can secure an alliance with the githyanki to attend to the mind flayer threat growing in the natural world.

Part One: Blood Mountain

The mages' portal opens onto the mountain slopes just outside the entrance to Citadel Mercane.

The portal transports you to a blood-red shelf overlooking a jagged slope that eventually gives way to loose bits of rock and debris hanging in the Astral Sea. Above, the scarlet mountain rises toward a distant peak, obscured by petrified trees, jutting protrusions, and roiling mist. A path winds up the mountain to a massive cleft from which sulfurous smoke streams. A strange vessel emerges from the plume, sleek and fitted with sails, spheres crackling with lightning, and other spars, and then it vanishes in a flash of light.

Blood Mountain has a sinister reputation and for good reason. According to legend, the mountain is an ancient battlefield where god and primordial fought and died. Their spilled blood turned the mountain its crimson color. The place is by no means safe, because in the ruins clinging to its surface and beneath the petrified trees foresting its rugged slopes lurk astral stalkers, blood fiends, and worse.

Help or Hindrance?

The Separatists truly intended to meet the council's envoys at Citadel Mercane, but Tiamat's operatives dashed these plans, murdering them before the PCs arrive. Among the retinue and the only one to survive was a raavasta spy named Mayhem. The fiend infiltrated the githyanki long ago and accompanied the group hoping to muck it up. When Tiamat's agents attacked, they upset his plans and now he's quite upset with the goddess.

When the adventurers head toward the smoking cleft, they encounter Mayhem disguised as a strange humanoid creature, but before they have a chance to speak, the mountain's denizens attack.

Tactical Encounter: Mayhem's Plight (page 53).

Consequences

Defeating the blood fiends and saving Mayhem can give the PCs an edge later when they enter the githyanki city. If Mayhem is unharmed in the fight, the characters gain one future victory toward finding the githyanki city (page 55). If Mayhem flees or is killed, the PCs suffer one defeat instead.

Aftermath

Once the blood fiends are destroyed or driven off, Mayhem approaches the adventurers (if he didn't run away).

The odd fellow approaches and says, "Many thanks my friends. Had not you interceded on this humble servant's behalf, poor Mayhem would have found the Raven Queen's unwelcome embrace, but not before enduring the equally unpleasant teeth and claws of those terrible brutes. In exchange for your heroic intervention to save this unworthy life, I am duty-bound to return the favor if you will allow me. But first, introductions are undoubtedly in order. As my errant words may have indicated already, I am Mayhem, your humbled and indebted servant. Citadel Mercane is very much my home away from home; perhaps I can be of some service?

Mayhem might be a useful ally to the adventurers in spite of his evil alignment and dubious morals. The raavasta knows a great deal about the planes and can provide assistance as shown in later sections. The fiend's willingness to help stems from his newfound

hatred for Tiamat combined with the hope for a new and terrible war in the Astral Sea, which he believes will result when and if the Separatists come to power in Tu'narath.

The raavasta knows the route to Tu'narath, and he also knows what happened to the Separatists' envoys, but he doesn't share this information right away or explain how he witnessed his companions' death. Instead, he waits and watches, gauging the characters' worthiness and planning to manipulate events from behind the scenes to ensure Vlaakith eventually comes to power.

Mayhem never participates in combat, and he disappears while the fighting rages only to reappear once it's done. He follows the PCs, giving advice when requested, but never volunteering anything. If the PCs dismiss him, he continues to monitor them, but from afar, and might assume different identities to ingratiate himself with the adventurers.

Additional Encounters

If the PCs don't head for the cleft and to Citadel Mercane beyond right away, they can explore the mountain. It's a desolate peak, haunted by wreckage from the ancient war and littered with bones. While exploring, the PCs are bound to come across the mountain's inhabitants, and none are friendly.

Agents of Mephistopheles

Level 19 Encounter (XP 12,950)

2 ice devils (*Monster Manual®, page 63*)
4 legion devil legionnaires (*Monster Manual, page 64*)
1 war devil (*Monster Manual, page 67*)

When Gith escaped the Iron Tower in the Nine Hells, Dispater sent his aspect to chase her down. All this activity has not gone unnoticed by the archdevil's rivals, and Mephistopheles has sent agents of his own to discover what Dispater is after and to thwart him if possible. These agents followed Tiamat's forces from Tu'narath and witnessed the destruction of the githyanki envoys. The devils lurk in a petrified forest, where they argue about what they should do next.

Crimson Hunters

Level 21 Encounter (XP 16,600)

2 astral stalkers (*Monster Manual*, page 10)

Blood Mountain is home to astral stalker tribes, and their numbers are so great, few travelers risk exploring the mountain's ruins. The astral stalkers prowl the slopes invisibly, watching for intruders and slaughtering any they find for trophies.

Citadel Mercane

Deep in the mountain, reached only by an enormous fissure, stands Citadel Mercane. Built centuries ago by a race of planar merchants to serve as a trade hub for their enterprise, the citadel still serves in this capacity, but also as a refuge for exiles, criminals, and other planar scum. The founders have long since vanished, ceding power to the marut mercenaries who were hired to guard the settlement and to a new cabal known as the Seven Diamonds Society.

The characters must pass through the cleft and travel nearly a half-mile into the mountain to reach the outpost.

The mists thin and give way to an enormous chamber, easily a mile in diameter. Red crystals as long as towers encrust the walls. Suspended in the chamber's center is a spheroid architectural mass of minarets, walls, stairs, and bridges. Steel struts emerge from the fortress and extend to the walls to keep it in place. Piers bristle from these supports, looking like hairs from afar, but you can see an astounding assortment of vessels, ranging from tiny skiffs to astral hulks crewed by hundreds. Traffic moves through yawning gates constructed to resemble toothy mouths. You can see a half-dozen facing your direction.

No bridges grant access to the Citadel, but the Astral Sea's nature allows even non-flying individuals to fly. It's about a quarter-mile through the air to reach the fortress, and so it takes about five minutes to cross the distance.

Maneuvering in the Astral Sea

A creature can stand on any surface equal to or larger than its base. It gains the ability to fly at one-half its normal speed if not under the effect of gravity. It can hover, but it is a clumsy flier. A creature with the ability to fly can use its innate flying speed instead. It gains hover.

Tu'narath and Subjective Gravity: Anyone within 200 feet of a surface in Tu'narath is subject to normal gravity. (See "Tu'narath, City of Death" in *Dragon* #377 for more information about the city.)

Citadel Mercane

A trade compound in the heart of a mountain, Citadel Mercane sees traffic from all sorts of planar peoples.
Population: 9,000. The Citadel boasts a diverse population consisting of just about every kind of civilized creature imaginable, from angels to devils, from humans to maruts. Githyanki are numerous since they often duck into the Citadel to trade plunder for supplies.
Government: The Society of Seven Diamonds rules Citadel Mercane with the permission of the marut mercenary companies who enforce the law here. The Society is made up of seven raavasta, each of whom conceals its true appearance behind a mask. The high cabalist is Tordaka, a raavasta who appears in public as a humanoid with golden skin and sporting overlarge feathery wings. His greatest rival is a corrupt and decadent fiend named Trethrix, who prefers the disguise of a svelte young woman.
Defense: The maruts protect the stronghold from attacks. Three mercenary companies billet here, and the Iron Sons are the oldest and have the most influence.
Commerce: A bustling black market thrives in the Citadel, and any goods can be had for a price. Drugs, poisons, cursed items, terrible rituals, astral vessels, magic items, slaves, and anything one could want are all for sale. Most trading takes place in the open-air market that sprawls just inside the outer wall and surrounds the inner fortress. The best inn and tavern is the Dreaming Spire, boasting thirty rooms and a menu with cuisines hailing from no less than a dozen worlds and a hundred civilizations.
Organizations: Temples of any sort are not permitted in the Citadel, but priests of every god, living and dead, are free to move about the city. Many planar factions including the Xaositects, the Fated, the Mercykillers, and even the Doomguard have offices here.

The Bazaar

Just inside the outer wall is the floating bazaar, an insane collection of floating platforms and free-floating structures filled with planar travelers.

Even before you pass through the gate, you get a sense of the chaos and wonder of the Bazaar. It is a maze of floating earthmotes, each crowded with merchants hawking their wares. Visitors float from stall to stall, swapping platinum coins for all manner of goods. You spy larger structures too, some sideways towers, others spherical buildings, while others still could pass for ordinary in your native world if not for the fact that they float about, drifting through the marketplace. Astonishingly, there are no collisions even though everything is in motion.

Beyond, or perhaps beneath, is an interior wall, hundreds of feet away, and it sports more gates and tall statues of strange humanoids that look up at commerce's dance above.

Merchants use stalls situated on small earthmotes ranging from 2-by-2 platforms to more sizeable structures containing bits of architecture, fossilized bones, and other oddities. The free-floating maze is in constant motion, so mapping the place is both unnecessary and impossible. To help navigate the Bazaar, tiny mechanical servants—guides—flit through the crowds, offering aid to any traveler who appears lost. These creations are artfully crafted, each unique and strange. Examples included tiny dragons, cherubic babies, metal skulls with glowing eyes, shimmering balls of light, and so on. Each guide is a construct with AC 27, other defenses 22; 1 hp. They cannot attack, and they explode in a shower of harmless sparks if destroyed.

Using a guide or not, the PCs can find just about anything they could want here. Let the PCs sell off equipment, make purchases, and make any other preparations they need before proceeding with the adventure.

Inner Sphere

Below the Bazaar is the Inner Sphere, a sealed orb of stone and iron pierced by a half dozen gates protected by adamantine doors that have powerful wards placed upon them. No one outside of the Society of the Seven Diamonds and the marut bodyguards are permitted within the sphere. Standing all across its surface are twenty-foot tall statues depicting the Citadel's founders. Some say the statues are in fact the founders, now forever trapped in stone.

Rumors hold the Inner Sphere contains vast wealth and plenty. It is a paradise of which one can only dream. Outsiders clamber to catch a glimpse of what goes on beyond its walls, but none have seen anything but shifting mists.

The rumors are wrong. The Inner Sphere holds a hideous wound in the Astral Sea—a permanent rent allowing passage to the Abyss. The raavasta, who hail from the Elemental Chaos, use this portal to move between planes.

Word on the Street

Characters might make Streetwise checks in the Bazaar to learn general information about the place. Mayhem grants the PCs gain a +2 bonus to their Streetwise checks.

DC	Information
20	Citadel Mercane has stood for a thousand years and is a popular trade center for the merchants across the Astral Sea.
25	The Citadel is open to all, provided visitors respect its laws. The most important commandment is "Harm no one." The watch does not tolerate violence in the city, and those who break this law are either cast out or executed. There are exceptions, though. Why just the other day, a group of githyanki from Tu'narath was slaughtered outside the Dreaming Spire. The maruts did nothing and no one knows why.
35	Merchants run this city. They rarely emerge from the Sphere (the inner compound), but when they do, there is much fanfare and celebration.
40	There are whispers that the ruling cabal murdered and replaced the rightful lords of the Citadel. A century ago, the original rulers just up and vanished, and the new cabal moved in right after.

Buying and Selling

The characters can purchase any magic item, ritual, or alchemical formula of their level or lower without any trouble. A specific item above their level requires a DC 27 Streetwise check to locate. Finding an astral vessel or a sigil address requires a bit more work, as described in the following entries.

Characters can also find buyers in the city. Items of the characters' level or less sell for the standard resell price. Selling items above the characters' levels can bring a slightly higher price with negotiation. A character can accept the flat price or engage in a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures) involving DC 22 Bluff, Diplomacy, and Insight checks. A success sees the character receive one-quarter of the item's price, while failure results in one-sixth of its value. The character must accept these terms.

Loosed Demons

At some point while the adventurers explore the Bazaar, they discover just how dangerous Citadel Mercane can be.

Tactical Encounter: Demons Among Us (page 56).

Consequences: Defeating the goristro demons gives the PCs an edge when trying to enter the city. Destroying them counts as one victory.

The Dreaming Spire

There are no shortages for places to stay, but characters looking for accommodations find the Dreaming Spire is their best choice (especially since they were to meet the envoys here). A strange structure, it looks almost like a tree rising from the middle of the market. Both the top and bottom are taverns called Night and Day respectively, and the main walled area—the trunk—holds thirty rooms. Guests can arrange for rooms and meals in either tavern.

When the PCs ask after Rel'thrik, they learn he was killed in the streets by a huge blue dragonspawn and dark angels. The human bartender looks closely at the PCs, sighs, and then hands them a small metal box. He says, "He said people'd come looking for him and left it for them. Guess those people would be you, huh?"

The metal box is bronze and featureless except for a thumb-sized groove on the bottom. Placing a digit in the groove causes the box to float upward and unfold. Appearing in the center is a shimmering illusion of the githyanki they were to meet. It speaks at once, "My mission has failed. The Dark Lady's agents infest this place, and our efforts have proved insufficient to evade them. If you truly wish to make an alliance, come to Tu'narath and we will find you." The illusion flickers and dies. Moments later, the box evaporates as if it had never been.

Githyanki Questions

The characters might ask around for general information on Tu'narath and the githyanki to get a better sense of what they are about to get into. Characters can make Streetwise checks in place of Nature checks for Githyanki Lore (*Monster Manual*, page 129). In addition, a successful DC 40 check reveals, "A little over twenty years ago, the Lich-Queen fell victim to a coup, murdered in her palace during a dread ritual that would have catapulted her to divinity. The city fell into bloody civil war until a warrior named Zetch'r'r claimed her throne. Some say he managed this only because he made a deal with Tiamat."

Running Afoul of the Law

Level 21 Encounter (XP 16,000)

5 marut blademasters (*Monster Manual*, page 185)

If the characters are on their best behavior, they aren't likely to find too much trouble. However, their investigations might take them into danger and, by extension, combat. Since rule zero in the Citadel is "harm no one," a fight could cause the PCs problems.

Once the characters get into a fight, they have a 10% chance each day they spend in the city of encountering the Citadel's watch. Combats after the first increase the chance by 20%, so 30% per day for two fights, 50% for three, and so on. A typical combat with the watch features the creatures here. If the PCs defeat the watch, they must move quickly lest the full weight of the Citadel's wrath comes crashing upon them (featuring whatever epic-level monsters you feel are appropriate).

To the Githyanki City

With the githyanki contacts dead, the adventurers can either return home or push on to Tu'narath. Getting there is a challenge since the githyanki guard the routes to their city and also keep secret any shortcuts that might allow swift passage. Though the information they seek is secret and often guarded, the PCs can uncover ways to reach the city with a little effort.

Skill Challenge: Finding Tu'narath (page 55).

Dealing with the Devil

A failed Bluff check made as part of the "Finding Tu'narath" skill challenge (page 55) or inquiries made in the Citadel's dark underbelly (a DC 28 Streetwise check) turns up a name: Scaramandar. A crime lord, information-broker, and cambion, Scaramandar has extensive contacts throughout the Astral Sea, with eyes and ears from the natural world to Sigil and most places in between. He's a useful sort to befriend, if you can afford his steep prices.

The cambion knows all about the adventurers and their past exploits. He also knows what they are after, what happened to their contacts, and, best of all, how to get to Tu'narath. Scaramandar possesses a sigil address to a little-used teleportation circle hidden within Tu'narath's Merchant District. He also can fabricate the proper documentation to get the characters into the city and through the cordon. All of this is available at no charge, if, and only if, the PCs agree to do him a favor.

Scaramandar wants a seat on the Society of Seven Diamonds. Trethrix, a particularly corrupt and decadent member, blocks his ascent. The cambion is certain, thanks to promises from other members, that her removal will open the path to his ascent. Scaramandar isn't about to get his hands dirty, and the PCs represent an excellent way to get rid of his rival and remove the killers by sending them to what he believes is certain death in the githyanki city.

When the PCs start asking around about Scaramandar, the cambion sends two agents to arrange a meeting at a place Scaramandar controls. The servants are a pair of rakshasa nobles (*Monster Manual*, page 217) disguised to be appealing to the adventurers. The rakshasas invite the PCs to meet with their master at Night (the tavern at the Dreaming Spire) for

a meal and a profitable conversation. If the characters agree, they can meet at whatever time they wish.

Seated in a large chair at a table crowded with a dozen handsome mortals representing several different races is an overlarge humanoid with an infernal mien. He has crimson skin, curling black horns emerging from his forehead, and long, oiled black hair, all of which suggests some devilish ancestry. He smiles and stands, revealing brilliant robes of uncertain hues embroidered with obscene images. He spreads his arms wide in a gesture of welcome. His playthings scatter. "Greetings friends. It comes to my attention you have need of information. Perhaps I can help."

Scaramandar starts by describing what happened to the githyanki operatives, revealing that a bluespawn godslayer leading a force of angels ambushed the envoys and murdered them all. The maruts didn't respond because Tiamat's forces had made arrangements with a "Diamond" named Trethrix—she paid off the merchant princess in exchange for no reprisals.

The cambion then steers the conversation to the adventurers' mission, but, if the characters seem worried, he says, "You have nothing to fear from me friends. I think your task is worthy, though I fear the obstacles placed in your path might be too great without friendly assistance." Scaramandar then lays out his offer—a ritual scroll of Planar Portal, a sigil address to Tu'narath, and trade exemptions for all. In exchange, he asks the characters to assassinate Trethrix: "Kill her, and you'll be in the githyanki city before her blood dries." Scaramandar honors the bargain, and any Insight check reveals this fact.

Scaramandar is not worried the PCs will betray him. He knows quite a bit about their activities, and his information would be of extensive interest to Zetch'r'r. He might share what he knows with Tiamat's operatives (as you decide).

Scaramandar fights back if the PCs attack him, and four rakshasa nobles hidden in the crowd come to his aid straightaway. A battle here draws the maruts' attention too. Five marut blademasters show up at the start of the third round, coming to Scaramandar's aid and making the entire battle very one-sided against the adventurers.

The cambion supplies additional information if the PCs agree to his proposal.

"Excellent friends, excellent. Trethrix and her retinue are due to make their appearance in 12 hours. She is at her most vulnerable once she returns to the inner sphere. Opening and closing those portals takes about 5 minutes, so when she arrives she must wait for the gate to open. Strike then and strike quick, lest the Iron Sons appear and foil the attempt. When you finish, bring her head to me just beyond the cleft. There, all I have promised you will be yours. I warn you, if the maruts catch you, I can do nothing to help you. Agreed?"

With their mission in hand, the PCs are free to make any needed arrangements before they attack.

Tactical Encounter: The Devil's Bargain (page 58).

Adaptation: Rather than have this encounter take place in Citadel Mercane, you could run it in Tu'narath. Characters seeking access to the Fortress of Three Sorrows could turn to the cambion for assistance. Trethrix is a rival merchant who is blackmailing him, and he would see her removed.

Scaramandar **Level 20 Elite Controller**
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 5,600

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
HP 382; **Bloodied** 191
AC 33; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 34
Immune charm; **Resist** 15 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, fly 8 (clumsy)
Action Points 1

Greatsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**
+25 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Scaramandar makes two *greatsword* attacks. If both attacks hit the same target, the ongoing 5 damage becomes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Hellfire Doom (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Fire**
Ranged 10; targets one or two creatures; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 7 fire damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Shackles of Phlegethos (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 10; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 fire damage, and if the target moves more than 1 square on its turn it takes 10 fire damage, and if the target makes an attack on its turn it takes 10 fire damage (save ends both).

Hellfire Storm (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Fear, Fire, Zone**
Area burst 2 within 10; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 fire damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends both). The burst creates a zone that lasts until the end of Scaramandar's next turn. Each enemy that starts its turn within the zone cannot make saving throws until the end of its next turn. As a move action, Scaramandar can move the zone up to 4 squares. *Sustain Minor:* The zone persists.

Brimstone Jaunt (move; encounter) ✦ **Fire, Teleportation**
Close burst 1; +24 vs. Fortitude; the target is blinded (save ends). *Effect:* Scaramandar teleports 20 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Bluff +21, Diplomacy +21, Insight +19, Intimidate +21, Streetwise +21
Str 25 (+17) **Dex** 17 (+13) **Wis** 18 (+14)
Con 23 (+16) **Int** 19 (+14) **Cha** 22 (+16)
Equipment fine robes, greatsword

In exchange for her murder, Scaramandar gives the PCs a ritual scroll, ingredients, and sigil address to a permanent teleportation circle in room 1 of the Floating Fortress. In this scenario, the raavasta target does not get marut reinforcements; she's on her own.

The Merciless

The characters might think to steal an *astral skiff* on their own or get a hint to do so from a failed Endurance check during the "Finding Tu'narath" skill challenge. Plenty of vessels are docked at the piers outside the Citadel, and a group could hijack a vessel without too much trouble.

Characters snooping around the docks find a lone ship at the end of a pier. A Streetwise check can turn up useful information about the ship.

DC	Information
14	The *Merciless* hails from Tu'narath and is captained by a cruel and murderous githyanki warrior named Ri's'an. It's currently docked at the end of Pier Nine.
22	The ship took heavy damage during a raid on Hestavar and could not return to the githyanki city. The *Merciless* has been docked here for a few weeks, undergoing repairs. The repairs are all but complete, but the crew took heavy casualties during the raid
27	The crew has made few friends here, and if something bad were to happen, it's not likely they would get any help.

The characters can attack the ship without fear of attracting attention. The other captains detest these githyanki and turn a blind eye to any violence toward Ri's'an and his crew.

Tactical Encounter: Stolen Mercy (see 61).

Adapting the Encounter: You can run this encounter while the PCs are in Tu'narath. If the PCs need a way to reach the Fortress of Three Sorrows, the *Merciless* could get them there if they eliminate the captain and crew.

Consequences: A bold move to be sure, but one with far-reaching consequences. The ship is identified by the dragonknights, costing the PCs 2 defeats when trying to enter the city.

Shortcuts through the Void

The githyanki are vigilant in protecting Tu'narath and thus monitor all traffic coming into and out of the city, boarding vessels, inspecting containers, and subjecting craft to divinatory magic. So tight is this net that few smugglers have made much headway moving illicit goods into the city, and the githyanki make terrible examples of those who fail.

One smuggler, Taikus, knows a way and uses it to move slaves out of Tu'narath and to bring weapons and supplies into the city for the Separatists. If the adventurers are tipped off about his enterprise, it means his system has been compromised and the noose is ready to close about his neck.

The PCs likely come across Taikus by accident. If they choose to contact the smuggler, they find him at a warehouse on Pier 6, just outside the Citadel. The building stands between two empty docks. However, Tiamat's agents close in to kill the smuggler.

Tactical Encounter: Secret Way (see 63).

Adapting the Encounter: The adventurers might come across Taikus and his operation while in Tu'narath. Instead of granting access to a permanent portal, Taikus might arrange a meeting with the Separatists.

Consequences: Disrupting the smugglers' assistance to the Separatists is a major setback for the movement in Tu'narath. The PCs suffer 1 defeat when trying to enter Tu'narath.

The Sympathizer

Characters who successfully attain a victory on the "Finding Tu'narath" skill challenge (page 55) can have a meeting with Captain J'ladimir, the githyanki captain of *Gith's Memory,* a powerful *astral carrack.* J'ladimir was once a githyanki knight, but he resigned when Vlaakith was murdered by adventurers. He left his city to become a merchant, and he has sailed the Astral Sea these past two decades. Citadel Mercane is one his favorite ports.

J'ladimir is tall, thin, with angular features and a short, stubby nose. He has bright blue eyes and mottled skin. He wears chainmail armor and carries a distinctive silver longsword. Two decades as a merchant have done nothing to soften his disposition toward nongithyanki. He harbors a deep hatred for adventurers, blaming them, in part, for his queen's death. The only thing he hates more than nongithyanki is Zetch'r'r, for J'ladimir knows the blackguard was behind his lady's assassination.

J'ladimir hasn't officially joined the Separatists, but he's close. He resents Tiamat's surging influence, and his hate for the tyrant endures. Now that the Separatists claim to have Vlaakith CLVIII on their side, he's willing to help them.

In spite of his misgivings, he needs little convincing to help the PCs reach Tu'narath. The characters need only mention the Separatists, and he volunteers to ferry them to the city. If Mayhem is present, the characters don't even need to mention their mission. J'ladimir also supplies the adventurers with the

proper documentation to enter the Merchant District. This is the extent to which J'ladimir will help. He offers nothing about the city, about the political developments, or anything else—such is his disdain for the adventurers. Passage on his ship is simple and uncomfortable, but it's passage all the same.

His ship leaves the day after the PCs meet with him, so the characters still have time to make purchases, perform rituals, and do anything else they need while at the Citadel.

If All Else Fails

It's unlikely but possible for the adventurers to utterly fail in finding a way to Tu'narath. If they exhaust every option and still haven't secured passage, let the PCs purchase an *astral skiff* for 13,000 gp. Mayhem can lead the characters to the city. Otherwise, the PCs will have to follow another ship—perhaps the *Merciless*. This should get the characters there, but it doesn't quite get them into the city. Mayhem can provide the characters with trade exemptions for the modest sum of 1 pp per character.

Sailing the Astral Sea

Adventurers who do everything right at Citadel Mercane gain passage on *Gith's Memory* and need only wait for the ship to arrive at Tu'narath. If the characters followed up the other leads and participated in those encounters, the trip to the githyanki city should be uneventful. However, skipping one or more of these side-treks puts the adventurers a little behind on experience points. You can catch the characters up by repurposing skipped encounters while the PCs are in Tu'narath, or you might run one or more of the following optional encounters.

Githyanki Raiders

Level 19 Encounter (12,000 XP)

5 githyanki dragonknights (page 68)
5 pact dragons (page 69)

A wing of dragonknights riding pact dragons patrol the Astral Sea to intercept explorers and plunder merchants not bearing trade exemptions.

Infernal Envoys

Level 19 Encounter (12,200 XP)

2 ice devils (*Monster Manual*, page 63)
7 legion devil veterans (*Monster Manual*, page 64)
1 war devil (*Monster Manual*, page 67)

A war devil in service to Glasya (archdevil and lord of the sixth layer of Nine Hells) crosses the Astral Sea bound for Tytherion, where it intends to meet with Tiamat to negotiate for another legion of abishai thralls. If the adventurers missed out on any treasure parcels, they can recover them from this entourage.

Malachi's Refugees

Level 19 Encounter (12,152 XP)

2 gibbering abominations (*Monster Manual*, page 126)
4 grimlock followers (*Monster Manual*, page 148)
1 mind flayer mastermind (*Monster Manual*, page 188)

Fleeing the upheaval in the natural world when the alienist Malachi ("Brink of Madness," *Dungeon Magazine* #163) failed to create a stable portal to the Far Realm, this mind flayer mastermind and its followers ride on a makeshift chariot made from a massive statue's head pulled by two gibbering abominations.

Part Two: Tu'narath

Having crossed the Astral Sea's expanse by portal or by vessel, the adventurers find Tu'narath, the ancient githyanki city, lying before them. Never a welcoming place, Tu'narath is made even more uninviting by Tiamat's occupying force and its crushing, totalitarian regime. How the adventurers find the city depends on the methods used to reach it.

By Ship

Characters approaching Tu'narath must contend with the sentinels if they want to reach the city intact.

If the adventurers reach the city by way of a planar vessel, read:

Your vessel breaks through the shimmering astral essence and there, amid the sea of sparkling lights, floats Tu'narath. Citadels drift around the city, each a cluster of spurs, towers, and chains connecting these floating fortresses to smaller roosts. Dragons with riders soar through the firmament as massive astral warships perform training maneuvers over the city.

Beyond the traffic, and beyond the strongholds' net, is the city. Although bristling with towers and strongholds, wormed with roads, and spewing black plumes of smoke, its foundation is clear. The city grows like tumors all over a dead creature's petrified remains. What's clearly a head stands at one end. From its shoulders stretch six arms, each ending at steel docking towers crowded with ships. Structures armor the being's torso, extending down to what would have been its abdomen but is now a crumbling region dimpled with dark caverns and littered with debris.

The Cordon

The githyanki are not about to let a band of adventurers enter the city. Not long after Tu'narath comes into view, a wing of dragonknights surrounds the vessel to inspect the cargo and ensure the ship has the trade exemption needed to dock at the stations. (Use the "Githyanki Raiders" encounter on page 37.)

Characters on board *Gith's Memory* have nothing to fear. Captain J'ladimir has documentation and presents it to the dragonknight when she comes aboard. J'ladimir is feared and respected enough that the githyanki don't search the vessel and, in fact, escort it the rest of the way to the docking stations.

Without J'ladimir, the PCs must fend for themselves. What sort of welcome the adventurers face depends on how they acquitted themselves in Citadel Mercane. Total the number of victories and defeats from any encounters as described under the "Consequences" entries. Characters receive no experience points for any of the skill challenges related to entering the city.

One or More Victories: The githyanki dragonknights are secret members of the Separatists. They make a great show of searching the ship and interrogating the adventurers, but ultimately, they allow the heroes to make the rest of the way to the Docking Stations without trouble. If Mayhem is not present, the githyanki also suggest the characters go to the Morningstar Inn to find "proper accommodations."

No Victories, No Defeats: The characters' ship is searched by two githyanki dragonknights, while the others position themselves around the PCs' vessel. If the characters picked up trade exemptions at Citadel Mercane, their ship is searched, but the PCs are eventually permitted into the city. If the characters didn't, they must succeed on a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures) involving Bluff and Diplomacy skill checks against DC 22, or Intimidate checks against DC 27. A victory earns the PCs a trade exemption and passage into the city. Defeat sees the PCs taken to the Fortress of Three Sorrows (page 43) where they are to be incarcerated and eventually executed. The adventurers might resist capture as they like, but if they lose or go along with the githyanki, they are interred at the Fortress of Three Sorrows (page 43) where they should have a chance to escape, recover their gear, and rescue Vlaakith. Mayhem could prove a useful ally in the event that this happens.

If the characters defeat the dragonknights, the city will mobilize a response (use creatures from "Assaulting the Fortress" on page 68). The PCs might retreat, and might even return to Citadel Mercane to find another way into the city. A loss against the githyanki results in incarceration at the Fortress of Three Sorrows, as described above.

In any event, don't forget the PCs need to get into the city, so poor decisions should make it harder, but not impossible.

One Defeat: As above, but the skill challenge DCs increase by 5.

Two or More Defeats: The characters are automatically escorted to the Fortress of Three Sorrows as described above.

Docking Stations

Past the cordon, the PCs can disembark from their vessel at the docking stations rising up from the "arm" accessing the city's Merchant District. The docking stations are metal piers stabbing out from the arm. Each pier can hold up to eight ships. Here, the adventurers can see the city's diversity: Plenty of githyanki

live and work here, but devils, maruts, dragonborn mercenaries, and all sorts of other creatures do so as well. The PCs are safe at the docking stations and can proceed into the Merchant District without trouble.

By Portal

If the adventurers came up with another way to enter the city, they can bypass all the trouble with the cordon and arrive in a dim alley tucked between two tall towers in the Merchant District.

If the adventurers reach the city by portal, read:

The portal deposits you in a refuse-littered alley drenched in shadows. Ahead of you, the alley opens onto a crowded street filled with merchants and travelers alike. Behind you, the rough stone side street disappears as it makes its way deeper into the buildings scraping the shimmering sky.

The permanent teleportation circle on the alley's ground is hidden behind a permanent illusion masking the alley's entrance. Smugglers use the alley to move in and out of the city without attracting attention. The illusion masking the alley is identifiable as such with a successful DC 20 Arcana check. A few githyanki are aware of it, but they find it useful, so they have not yet destroyed it. This said, they monitor the portal, and the adventurers' sudden appearance sees a githyanki kill team descend on the alley after 5 rounds. If the characters linger this long, proceed with the following tactical encounter.

Tactical Encounter: Kill Squad (page 65).

Adaptation: If the kill squad doesn't arrive in time, or the PCs don't come to the city by way of portal, you can use this encounter at any point after the PCs arrive, but before Part Five.

City Overview

Tu'narath is a sprawling metropolis built atop the petrified remains of a dead god known only as the One in the Void. Much of Tu'narath remains as it always has, but it has not emerged from the tumultuous last decades unscathed.

Vlaakith's mad rituals sent shockwaves through the city, destroying Susurrus, the Palace of Whispers, and reducing the necropolis and the statue of Gith to rubble. Damage from this event can still be seen in adjoining military districts and the city has worked to rebuild.

The Merchant District, however, is more or less intact. Although overrun by Tiamat's agents and soldiers, the githyanki still do not allow nongithyanki

who have no affiliation with the war effort to venture farther than the commercial quarter, and those who push into the neighboring districts find themselves beset by overwhelming numbers. Luckily, the Separatists operate in the Merchant District, blending in with the other merchants.

Exploring the City

The characters are free to explore the Merchant District, but their purpose here is to contact the Separatists.

Rumors in Tu'narath

The characters can learn more about current events in the city by making Streetwise checks.

DC	Information
28	Emperor Zetch'r'r rules the city, and the githyanki of Tu'narath fight on Tiamat's behalf.
30	Zetch'r'r came to power after foreigners assassinated the Lich-Queen Vlaakith, and he has ruled for 25 years.
35	Many believe Zetch'r'r had a hand in Vlaakith's death and point to his close ties to Tiamat as further proof of his treachery. Not all are so willing to fight for Tiamat.
40	Vlaakith has returned and is allied with the Separatists. However, the emperor's warriors captured her and hold her someplace out of the city. If she were freed, she could rally the githyanki against Zetch'r'r's tyranny.

Shopping

The Merchant District has a robust market, and characters can purchase mundane and magic equipment up to their level. If the PCs didn't spend time properly outfitting themselves at Citadel Mercane, let them do so here.

TU'NARATH

Under Tiamat's heel, the former center of githyanki culture has now become a bastion of the Dark Lady's strength.

Population: 120,000; Githyanki are still the dominant people in Tu'narath, but they now share the city with Tiamat's legions. Unprecedented numbers of devils, dragonborn, dragonspawn, and other creatures have free rein to go where they please. Outside of these forces, visitors are still confined to the Merchant District, where a diverse population thrives.

Government: After foreigners assassinated Vlaakith CLVII, Emperor Zetch'r'r came to power. He rules by Tiamat's consent and is little more than a puppet. If he displeases Tiamat, his reign would come to an abrupt end.

Defenses: Most githyanki serve in the military with allegiance to a society found in the military districts. Military societies raise armies consisting of warriors, gish, and warlocks. Foremost of these warriors are the githyanki knights who ride dragons into battle. Numerous floating fortresses are arranged around the city, and each has a full company and two to four pact dragons to intercept foreign vessels coming too close to the city. In addition, Tiamat keeps four legions in the city to ensure her continued control. These mercenary forces are made up of dragonborn, humans, devils, abishai, and other creatures loyal to the Dark Lady. As powerful as they are, Tiamat knows they are only as strong as the dragons supporting them, and if the dragons quit the city, Tiamat's forces would surely follow.

Inns: The Morningstar Inn; Iron House; The Dragon's Den; others. The Morningstar Inn is the most expensive but most popular establishment in the Merchant District.

Taverns: The Winesink; Filthy Dredges; Nectar House; others.

Supplies: The Merchant District is the commercial center in the city and one can find just about anything they could want. Merchants sell from established shops, open-air markets, or carts along the streets. Businesses cluster together along streets set aside for trade. Kyndl Street, for example, offers alchemical supplies, poisons, and ritual ingredients.

Temples: For as long as Tu'narath has stood, it has never housed an official temple. With Zetch'r'r's reign, the city now has a grotesque temple dedicated to Tiamat that also serves as the emperor's palace.

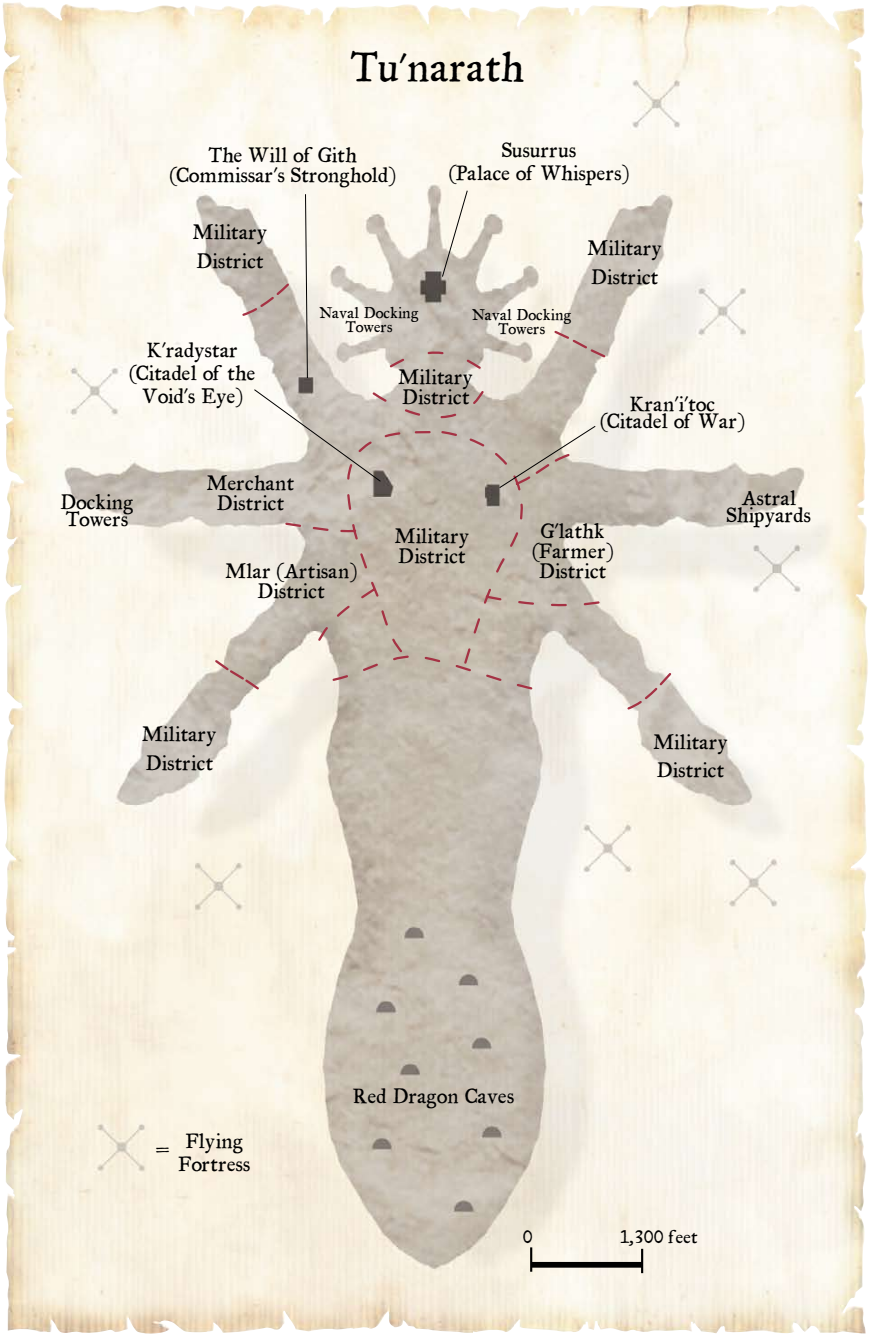
Enemies on All Sides

Although the Separatists took precautions when making contact with the Coalition, their efforts did not go undetected. Tiamat has spies everywhere, and her agents intercepted the message when they destroyed the githyanki waiting in Citadel Mercane. Still fearing an upset to her plans, Tiamat dispatched a favored servant to watch for the adventurers and intercept them before they make contact with the rebels. After the PCs enter the Merchant District, Tiamat's agents locate the PCs and attack.

Tactical Encounter: Blue Thunder (page 67).

Contact, Finally

The recent setbacks to the Separatists' efforts have forced them into hiding, but when the PCs destroy the bluespawn godslayer in "Blue Thunder," word spreads and agents set out to find the PCs. Mayhem knows exactly where the rebels hide and can lead the PCs to them if he is still in the party's company and if he's asked. Otherwise, just have a Separatist agent contact the PCs.



The crowds fill the streets in a seething mass. Finding the Separatists here is tantamount to finding courage in a kobold tribe. Yet even as this realization sinks in, you spy a hooded githyanki moving through the crowds, scanning for something. His eyes fall on you, linger for a moment, and then he moves away. It seems he wants you to follow.

The adventurers can trace the githyanki's route through the streets to a building not far from the docking towers.

The githyanki ducks into a two-story building constructed from stone, encrusted with leering gargoyles, and supported by flying buttresses. No sign hangs above the door, but the raucous laughter and clinking glass sounding from within indicate it's an inn or tavern or both.

The building is the Morningstar Inn, an infamous tavern with rooms to rent upstairs. It has the look of a gothic cathedral, so it blends in with the other buildings. Tall windows covered by rich curtains offer access into guest rooms on both floors. Double doors on one side lead into the common room, while another set offers discrete access to the private rooms. The latter doors are locked (DC 30 Thievery or DC 35 Strength to open) and fooling around with the doors causes Gharvag (the githyanki Separatist agent) to come around to bring the PCs inside to the common room.

The bawdy sounds you heard on the street are absent inside the large common room. An octagonal bar, painted black, commands the view and behind it stands an attractive tiefling in a revealing red dress. She smiles. The tables around the bar are empty except for one. There, you spot the githyanki you spied on the streets. He invites you to sit with a gesture.

The tiefling is Rhapsody, the owner and member of the Separatists. In the years since Zetch'r'r came to power, Rhapsody opened her doors to the rebels to serve as a base and haven. The place still operates as a tavern, but only Separatists come here.

The githyanki is Gharvag, a Separatist agent and contact for the adventurers. He has information useful to the PCs, but also plenty of bad news about what needs to be done before they have a chance to get the negotiations underway.

Plans Foiled?

Although he never expected to see the adventurers here, their appearance confirms suspicions that the envoys the Separatists sent are now dead. Gharvag is Vlaakith's right-hand man, but he has little authority. Like his mistress, he wants an alliance, but the emperor's secret police and oppressive tactics have driven the organization into hiding.

Gharvag can supply the PCs with missing information, and he answers the following questions.

What do you think happened to the envoys?

The emperor's agents must have intercepted our communications. Zetch'r'r's secret police have been rounding up sympathizers all over the city, forcing the leaders to lay low. We've been waiting for word from the envoys, and this explains the silence.

We're here. Let's talk.

I'm afraid you've come a long way for nothing. Our leader has been captured and is held at a flying fortress outside of the city. We haven't mounted a rescue mission since it would expose more of us to Zetch'r'r's reprisals.

While Vlaakith lies in chains, there can be no alliance. Should she become free, however . . .

Why do you need her?

Our leader is critical to our success, for she is none other than Vlaakith. She wants the gith peoples reunited and has little use for the treacherous goddess and her draconic legions.

Wasn't Vlaakith killed?

Yes, Vlaakith CLVII was destroyed around 25 years ago. I might not agree with the methods used to remove her from power, but she was mad. Had she succeeded in her designs, it would have meant the end for all of us. Our Vlaakith is different. Gone are the deific ambitions, and in their place is a renewed commitment to our glorious crusade against the mind flayers.

If we get her out, can we get this alliance hammered out?

I am certain Vlaakith's freedom will bring the rebels out from hiding, but even if you reach an agreement, I can't see how we can follow through on any promises. Zetch'r'r has the dragons on his side. As long as he carries the scepter of Ephelomon, the dragons will do as he says. Even with all our numbers, I'm not sure we can stand against such powerful enemies.

Rhapsody

If the characters blow it with Gharvag, Rhapsody can step in to calm the githyanki down and get the PCs back on track. She tells Gharvag that the PCs are their best hope at getting Vlaakith back and saying to him, "If you want them out of the war, you'd best get over your prejudices and see the allies standing in front of you."

Conclusions

No negotiations are going to happen while Vlaakith is imprisoned. Since Gharvag and the rest of the Separatists are unable or unwilling to free her, it falls to the adventurers to free her. Assuming the PCs suggest this course of action, Gharvag tells the characters she's in the Fortress of Three Sorrows, the stronghold in sight of the Chromatic Bastion, the seat of Zetch'r'r's power. If the characters go this route, proceed with Part Three.

Depending on how the conversation goes, the adventurers might gain a little insight into what lays ahead. Even if Vlaakith is freed, she probably will not follow through on any negotiations while the emperor sits on the throne. With this in mind, the PCs might get it into their heads to strike at Zetch'r'r first. This is fine. With Zetch'r'r dead, the githyanki won't rally behind anyone until Vlaakith presents herself and reveals she is in fact Gith reborn. This along with the destruction of the *scepter of Ephelomon* wrests the city from Tiamat's clutches. Go to Part Five if the characters are gunning for the emperor.

Regardless of which way the PCs go, if the PCs help, Gharvag gives them treasure parcel 7. Rhapsody hands the characters parcel 4 and says, "I think you can use this more than I can right now."

Part Three: Fortress of Three Sorrows

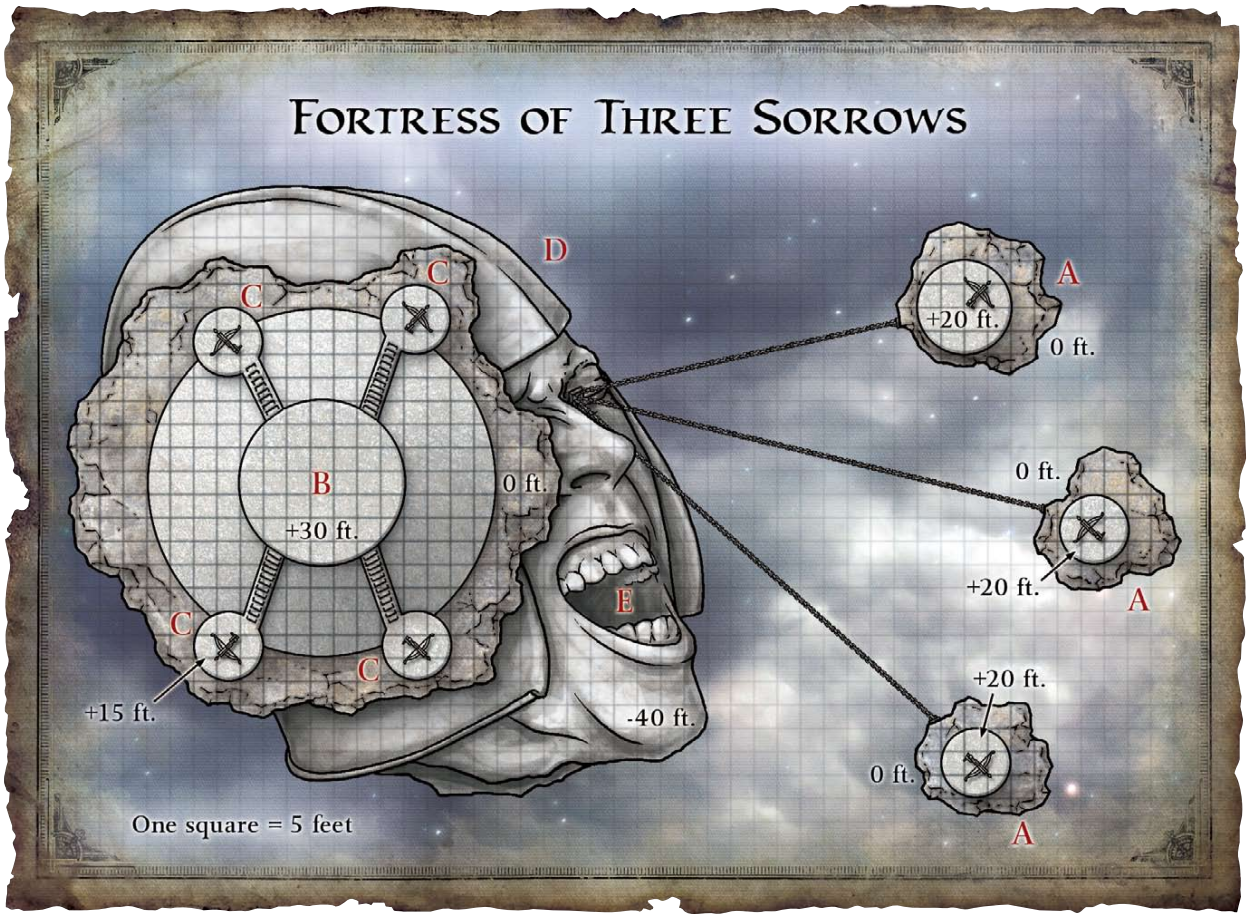
With the negotiations stalled and the PCs stuck behind enemy lines, their best shot at completing the mission is to rescue Vlaakith from her captors at the Fortress of Three Sorrows. The PCs might learn about her captivity from Gharvag or might stumble across her when they themselves are captured by the githyanki on a botched attempt to enter the city.

To most githyanki, attacking a floating fortress is a suicide mission. Each fortress boasts dragons and a full company of warriors. Worse, it's not like the fortress is somehow out of sight from the city, so there are bound to be reinforcements waiting to jump in and destroy the attackers. The sheer improbability of success and the brazenness required are what makes this entire foray possible.

The adventurers have two key advantages. One is time. A sudden strike at a fortress should let the PCs punch through the githyanki's defenses in 5 rounds or so. That's about 30 seconds. The other fortresses can't mobilize this quickly, so the characters can land and get inside before others can intercept them.

Second, the adventurers have unseen allies. The commander in charge of the floating fortress closest to the Three Sorrows is actually a Separatist member, and so any response from his citadel is slow to come if it happens at all.

How the PCs get to the fortress is up to them. Options include using an *astral skiff*, stowing away on a supply ship, using a ritual to bypass the defenses, and so on. Whatever they decide, they reach the fortress without too much trouble, aside from a likely skirmish with the fortress's defenders and the dangers posed by snatching a prisoner from the fortress.



Once the PCs free Vlaakith from her prison, she can speed the PCs back to the Morningstar Inn—there's a permanent teleportation circle in a locked room on the second floor—by using a Linked Portal ritual, provided she gets the ritual components.

Dungeon Features

The following features are generally true of all locations in the fortress.

Entrances: There are two ways into the fortress. The first is through the statue's mouth, where the garrison's pact dragons lair and where the githyanki store their *astral interceptors* (see page 46). The second is through a hatch on the central tower.

Ceilings: Except where indicated otherwise, ceilings are 20 feet tall.

Doors: Except for the cells, no doors are locked in the complex. Doors open into rooms unless noted otherwise. A door that joins two rooms opens into the larger room

Illumination: Everburning torches fill all rooms with bright light.

Stairs: Stairs are made from stone, and squares containing stairs count as difficult terrain while climbing them.

Fortress of Three Sorrows Overview

Like most other floating fortresses, the Fortress of Three Sorrows is a brooding structure to which there are tethered three smaller towers raised atop astral detritus. The fortress sits on top of a massive statue's head, tilted at a forty-five-degree angle, as if it was a tumor growing out from the statue's ear. The statue's features are that of a screaming human wearing an open-faced helm.

A. Satellite Towers

Tethered by chains forged from astral driftmetal to the fortress are three satellite towers perched atop rocky bergs. The bergs float on the astral horizon, and the towers rise 20 feet above them.

B. Main Tower

The central tower grants access to the fortress's interior. When under attack, the githyanki captain commands its forces from this location.

C. Ballista Platforms

The Main Tower sports four exposed staircases that each descend to a ballista platform. There, crews man these powerful siege engines and hurl death at enemies as they approach.

D. Statue's Head

The Fortress of Three Sorrows stands atop an ancient statue's decapitated head. The head floats on the astral horizon, and three chains spill from its tear duct to the satellite towers, giving the fortress its appropriate name.

E. Maw

The githyanki excavated the statue's mouth to serve as a hangar for two *astral interceptors* (see page 46) and two pact dragons.

0. Assault on the Fortress

Unless the PCs devise some way to sneak into the Fortress of Three Sorrows, they face stiff resistance when they descend on the stronghold.

Tactical Encounter: Assaulting the Fortress (page 68).

Adapting the Encounter: If the PCs sneak into the stronghold and thus bypass its defenses, consider denying Vlaakith the ability to perform the Linked Portal ritual. The adventurers have to escape the fortress by some other means. The "Into the Maw" tactical encounter on page 74 covers slipping out of the fortress by stealing an *astral interceptor* (see page 46).

1. Prison Level

The trapdoor on the rooftop opens onto an iron ladder that descends 30 feet to the floor below. The guardroom at the center is where the githyanki captain and soldiers meet with visitors and attend to general business. A narrow corridor rings the guardroom and grants access to several cells and also the barracks. One can descend to the armory below by way of a cramped spiral staircase in the center of the guardroom.

Tactical Encounter: Desperate Defenders (page 70).

2. Armory Level

This level takes its name, obviously, from the armories and storerooms that hold weapons, armor, and foodstuffs. As well, this level holds a training facility where githyanki warriors can spar and hone their techniques. Currently, the training room is where the githyanki hold Vlaakith, keeping her distanced from other warriors lest she corrupt them with her "lies."

The staircase descends from the prison level and continues to the hangar in the statue's maw.

When Gith escaped the Nine Hells, Dispater was none too pleased. The archdevil dispatched his aspect and bodyguards to Tu'narath to see what had happened and there discovered what was unfolding in the city. The aspect knew Gith would not give up her people, so Dispater has spent several weeks searching for her. The appearance of another Vlaakith was too obvious given that her predecessor had no heirs, so the aspect has traveled to the Fortress of Three Sorrows to "interview" the prisoner and confirm his suspicions.

Tactical Encounter: Jailbreak (page 72).

Armory: This room contains shelves loaded with mundane crossbow bolts, armor, and silvered weaponry.

Storerooms: Two storerooms hold foodstuffs, water, and other mundane supplies.

Vlaakith CLVIII

Defeating the aspect and the other creatures in this room lets the PCs focus on freeing Vlaakith from her prison. She can talk, but she cannot move. She doesn't say anything right off since she's not entirely sure who the PCs are and what they intend. She answers any questions the PCs put to her. What follows are likely questions and typical answers. Vlaakith doesn't have time to waste telling lies, so she answers to the best of her knowledge and truthfully, only shading where absolutely necessary.

So, who are you?

I am Vlaakith, the one hundred fifty-eighth of the name, and Tu'narath's rightful queen.

What are you doing here?

The so-called emperor's cronies attacked my quarters in the city and killed my guards. I fought, but they overpowered me.

Who the devil was that fellow you were talking to?

Dispater. Actually, it was his shadow, an aspect.

What was he doing here?

He believes I am not who I say I am.

Who does he think you are?

Gith.

Gith?

Gith led the uprising that toppled the illithid empire and freed her peoples from a thousand years spent in chains. Gith vanished soon after her people settled in the Astral Sea, and many believe she traded her soul to forge the pact between the scions of Ephelomon and the githyanki. According to legend, she was held in the Nine Hells, bound to an archdevil's will.

So if that was Dispater and he's looking for Gith, doesn't this mean Gith has escaped?

It would seem so.

If Gith has escaped, that means the pact is broken, right?

Again, you seem to have the right of it.

So, are you Gith?

Would it change matters if I was? You want the githyanki out of the war. I can make this happen, but only if you release me.

Vlaakith will not negotiate while she's a prisoner. Gith has been around for a while and is not about to be intimidated into making a bargain. Furthermore, it's not Gith the PCs have to convince: the supreme commanders who make up the Separatists need to be convinced to break with Tiamat for good fbefore the githyanki will end hostilities.

Pitfalls: The adventure expects the PCs to free Vlaakith, but the players might have other ideas. Abandoning Vlaakith to whatever fate is in store for her does not in fact contain Gith. She can abandon the flesh at any time and find a new host elsewhere. The only reason she hasn't yet is because she's established her new identity, and starting over again would be an annoying setback. As a consequence, the characters will never get the chance to negotiate with the Separatists to extract them from Tiamat's war. Destroying Zetch'r'r and revealing the broken pact will more or less remove the githyanki as a threat, but when the githyanki reorganize, the PCs' world is certain to be their first target.

The worst thing the characters can do is to attack Vlaakith. She might not yet be at full strength, but her power rivals that of an archdevil, and she should prove a deadly enemy, far stronger than what the PCs could hope to face at their level. Vlaakith isn't interested in slaughtering the party, and so she takes them all alive to use later against Zetch'r'r.

3. Hangar

The spiral stairs end at the hangar. The githyanki keep their pact dragon steeds, the two *astral interceptors*, replacement parts, and food for the mounts here.

Astral Interceptor
Gargantuan vehicle (astral skiff)

HP 250 **Space** 2 squares by 4 squares **Cost** 13,000 gp
AC 4; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 2
Speed fly 12 (hover), overland flight 15
Pilot
The pilot must stand at a control wheel, typically at the rear of the *astral interceptor*.
Crew
In addition to the pilot, an *astral interceptor* requires a crew of three, all of whom use a standard action each round to control the skiff. Reduce the skiff's fly speed by 4 squares for each missing crewmember. At fly speed 0, the *astral interceptor* sails out of control.
Load
Ten Medium creatures; one ton of cargo
Out of Control
An out-of-control *astral interceptor* moves forward at half speed (not including any modifiers for its astral sails).
Astral Attunement
The *astral interceptor* functions only in the Astral Sea.
Fragile Propulsion
For every 25 damage the *astral interceptor* takes, its speed is reduced by 2 squares. At fly speed 0, the ship comes to a stop.

The following tactical encounter occurs only if the PCs skipped "Assaulting the Fortress."

Tactical Encounter: Into the Maw (page 74.

Vlaakith CLVIII/Gith **Level 25 Solo Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 35,000

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +23
Forceful Presence aura 2; a bloodied enemy that starts its turn within the aura is pushed 5 squares.
HP 912; **Bloodied** 456
AC 39; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 41, **Will** 42
Immune fear; **Resist** 30 psychic
Saving Throws +5 (+7 against charm effects)
Speed 6; see also *mind over matter*
Action Points 2

⊕ **Unarmed Strike** (standard; at-will)
+30 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of Vlaakith's next turn, see *Gith's judgment*.

Ancient Wrath (standard; at-will)
Vlaakith makes an *unarmed strike* attack against up to three targets, and can use *time to die* as a free action before each attack. While bloodied, she can attack up to four targets.

Shattering Strike (free, when Vlaakith hits a creature with a melee attack; recharges when first bloodied)
The target takes a -2 penalty to defenses until the end of the encounter.

Stunning Impact (free, when Vlaakith hits a creature with a melee attack; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
The target is stunned until the end of its next turn.

Time to Die (minor; at-will)
Ranged 5; +27 (+32 against immobilized targets) vs. Fortitude; the target is pulled 5 squares. This action does not provoke opportunity attacks.

Telekinetic Bind (minor; recharges when no creatures are immobilized by this power)
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +28 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends).

Gith's Judgment
Vlaakith deals 3d6 extra damage to immobilized targets.

Mind over Matter (move; at-will)
Vlaakith flies 6 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Supernal
Skills Acrobatics +26, Athletics +21, Diplomacy +24, Dungeoneering +23, History +25, Insight +23, Intimidate +24
Str 18 (+16) **Dex** 28 (+21) **Wis** 22 (+18)
Con 20 (+17) **Int** 23 (+18) **Cha** 25 (+19)
Equipment simple clothing

Escaping the Fortress

After rescuing the prisoner, the PCs can escape by way of the Linked Portal ritual, fly out in a stolen astral vessel, or by some other means. With Vlaakith in tow, the adventurers need to return to the city and get things rolling, so let just about any plan work. If the PCs are stumped, have an NPC ally pick them up and ferry them back.

Once back in the city, the characters can lay low at the Morningstar Inn. Rhapsody has enough hideyholes to allow the entire party to disappear for as long as they need. There's not much time, however, for the attack did not go unnoticed and the emperor's wrath unleashes a storm like Tu'narath has never before seen.

Part Four: Negotiations

The emperor responds to Vlaakith's escape by closing off the city. Those floating fortress commanders who failed to stop the adventurers and didn't have the good sense to flee are summarily executed, and he installs new commanders loyal to himself and Tiamat in their place, many of which are not even githyanki. Military societies loyal to his throne mobilize and lay siege to those of uncertain reliability, while a full legion with red dragon support sweeps through the Merchant District searching for Vlaakith and her liberators.

As casualties mount, confidence in the emperor falters. Division and unrest spread across the city. Yet for all the dissatisfaction, none seem willing to rise up against Zetch'r'r as long as he has Tiamat's support. If they could remove Zetch'r'r and break his pact with the red dragons, the people would rise up and wrest the city free from Tiamat's grip.

The adventurers have proved their courage, their competence, and their ambition. In Vlaakith's eyes, they are the ones the movement needs to spark the revolution. Shortly after the characters return to the city (after they've had a chance to take an extended rest), Vlaakith calls the Separatists' leaders to a meeting. The PCs, representing the Coalition, can bargain with the leadership to forge an alliance and convince them to withdraw from Tiamat's unholy war.

Skill Challenge: A Turning Point (page 76).

Mayhem's Exit

After the negotiation, Mayhem decides Tu'narath is too dangerous a place to linger and chooses this time to make his exit. He bids the characters farewell and ducks out, vanishing into the city. Mayhem is unlikely to return, but if the characters ever find themselves in Citadel Mercane, they might have an ally or an enemy there depending on how they treated him.

Part Five: War for Tu'narath

Upon securing the agreement with the githyanki separatists under Vlaakith's command, the only thing left for the adventurers to do is to defeat Emperor Zetch'r'r. The emperor's forces are spread across the city, searching for Vlaakith, so the PCs need only deal with those left guarding Zetch'r'r's throne. While the PCs attack the emperor's palace, the Separatist leaders under Vlaakith's command spark the uprising, leading strikes against Tiamat's command centers and destroying those who have betrayed them. The Separatists are strong enough to fight for a time, but they need to rouse the rest of the city to their cause, something that can be achieved only by destroying the emperor.

The chaos and infighting wracking the city covers the PCs' approach to the bastion, so aside from a few incidental encounters (with combats of your design if the adventurers are not yet 20th level), they enter the shattered remnants of the Queen's District.

When the PCs enter, read:

A crumbling, mazelike necropolis of tombs and shattered statues spreads out in all directions. Paths wind through the wreckage and lead up to a towering cathedral wrought from black stone and fitted with windows set with multicolored glass. Before it stands the remains of an obsidian statue. Only two glossy black legs remain.

The Chromatic Bastion

Zetch'r'r rules Tu'narath from the Chromatic Bastion, an obscene cathedral built to honor Tiamat's role in his victory over his rivals. Built atop the ruins of the Lich Queen's palace, it symbolizes the end of Vlaakith's corruption and the githyanki's strengthened bonds to the Dark Lady of Avarice. It is a macabre place, filled with shadowy horrors and protected by githyanki, dragons, and a menagerie of terrible monsters.

Features of the Chromatic Bastion

The following features are common throughout the bastion unless otherwise mentioned in the text.

Illumination: Rooms are bright, lit by everburning torches set in iron sconces every 5 squares or so.

Doors: Iron doors are unlocked. Doors open into rooms unless noted otherwise. A door that joins two rooms opens into the larger room.

Combat: Don't feel confined by the maps presented in the tactical encounters. Combats can and should spill over into adjoining rooms. Avoid letting battles trigger additional encounters by having enemies push the PCs back the way they came.

Extended Rests

The Chromatic Bastion offers few opportunities for the adventurers to take extended rests. The PCs simply don't have 6 hours to spend recouping while their allies fight for the city's future on the streets beyond. Not only do the PCs give Zetch'r'r the time he needs to crush the uprising but also an extended rest gives the emperor a chance to recall his troops and stiffen his defenses.

Few adventuring parties have the resources and wherewithal to endure eight encounters in a row, so the Chromatic Bastion provides one location to help the PCs regain healing surges and daily powers without breaking the suspension of disbelief with a full-blown extended rest. If the PCs attempt an extended rest anyway, feel free to hit them with improvised encounters featuring githyanki minions to make the rest difficult.

0. The Necropolis

The adventurers must pass through the Necropolis to reach the Chromatic Bastion. Fallen heroes and notable githyanki were accorded the special honor of being interred in vaults within sight of the Palace of Whispers. Few, though, rested easy in their tombs, and those cursed with unlife wander the necropolis still.

Tactical Encounter: Stillness Broken (page 77).

1. Shattered Gith

Gith's statue, standing at the highest point in the Queen's District, has long stood as a reminder of the legendary hero's sacrifice and as an inspiration to continue to fight in her name. Vlaakith CLVII's aborted attempt to seize the divine spark within the One in the Void caused shockwaves to wash across the district, toppling Gith's intimidating statue and the Old Palace of Whispers on which the Chromatic Bastion now stands.

The brooding cathedral looms before you, an ugly thing that is squat and unadorned aside from the rainbow glass plates set around the ornately carved iron doors. Before the structure stand the remains of a once-impressive statue carved from solid obsidian. Only the legs, part of the waist, and sword blade remain, but you can tell it depicted a female warrior. Black dust and broken statuary litter the ground all around the statue, and rubble from an older structure covers the cathedral's grounds.

2. Antechamber

Adventurers destroyed Vlaakith CLVII and sundered her phylactery, but Zetch'r'r' preserved the Lich-Queen's essence in her spine and bound her to his service with terrible oaths. To show his scorn for his predecessor, he reduced her to a common sentinel.

Tactical Encounter: Evil's Backbone (page 79).

3. Gallery of Flame

The gallery of flame honors Tiamat in her red dragon aspect, and those who seek the fires of her greed might experience unspeakable desires in this fiery chamber.

Tactical Encounter: Red Sentinels (page 81).

4. Vestry

Zetch'r'r and his attendant priests use this chamber to don their priestly vestments when worshiping at one of the two altars.

Shelves cover the walls in this chamber, and each is laden with heavy ceremonial robes woven from brass thread. An iron door stands closed on the opposite wall. Ice rimes its surface.

5. Gallery of Ice

The door to this room is frozen shut and requires a DC 22 Strength check to open.

Although built to honor the Chromatic Dragon in her white dragon aspect, the emperor uses this chamber to store dragon carcasses for later use in Tiamat's war. Attending the remains are devils suited for the gallery's chilly environs.

Tactical Encounter: The Freezer (page 82).

6. Hall of Skulls

This chamber houses the mind flayer skulls recovered from the old Palace of Whispers. Since Zetch'r'r came to power, precious few skulls have been added.

Skulls, arranged in stacks that reach the ceiling, extend along the walls to the chamber's end. Most are damaged in some way or another, and all are of an alien shape.

A character that succeeds on a DC 22 Dungeoneering check recognizes the skulls as belonging to mind flayers.

7. Shrine of Queens

Although Zetch'r'r has nothing but scorn for the Lich-Queen, he has not fallen so far as to forget his heritage. This room honors the long line of queens who preceded the emperor.

Against the far wall stands a short porphyry altar holding a statuette of a proud githyanki woman wearing a crown. Statues of stern githyanki warriors stand in each corner, all eyes on the altar. Something about this room fills you with ease, making your mission and fears seem no longer pressing.

The sensations the PCs feel come from the ghosts of Vlaakith that haunt this chamber. They approve of the adventurers' mission. Not enough of them remain to manifest themselves in any way more than just a feeling. Characters can safely take an extended rest in this room.

Altar: Inspecting the altar and succeeding on a DC 27 Perception check reveals a hidden panel. Inside is a magnificently carved wooden box. Opening the box reveals a pulsing black heart. The box is

Vlaakith CLVII's phylactery, and if the characters defeated her in "Evil's Backbone," she reforms in this room after the requisite time has passed. Destroying the box (AC 10, Fortitude 5, Reflex 10; 5 hp) prevents Vlaakith from reforming and destroys her for good. A DC 27 Religion check identifies the box as being a phylactery.

If the characters take the box with them, Vlaakith reappears in a space adjacent to the box's carrier after the requisite number of days has passed and attacks at once.

8. Gallery of Decay

Zetch'r'r built this chamber to honor Tiamat in her black dragon aspect. Currently, though, the emperor sets aside this chamber to hold curiosities recovered during the war. Since these "items of interest" are in fact dangerous creatures, the emperor set mercenaries to guard them.

Tactical Encounter: Curiosities (page 84).

9. Gallery of Death

This chamber honors Tiamat in her green dragon aspect and sports a beautiful idol of the goddess in emerald. Since this chamber grants access to Zetch'r'r's private quarters, he places tough guards to ensure he is not disturbed.

Tactical Encounter: Emerald Statue (page 86).

10. Guard Post

Although Zetch'r'r commits his forces to crushing the Separatists, he keeps a small force of githyanki here as insurance. Guards positioned here listen for sounds of combat with the dragons in room 3 and alert their cohorts in room 11 to make ready for a fight.

Tactical Encounter: Those Who Are About to Die (page 88).

11. Barracks

Off-duty githyanki spend their time in these chambers. Each room consists of two or more bunk beds and a small table with a basin and water. The central rooms are residences for the gish'saraths (githyanki swordmasters).

Tactical Encounter: Those Who Are About to Die (page 88).

12. Hall of Heroes

To promote loyalty among his warriors, the emperor had this room covered in bas-relief carvings depicting githwarriors battling githzerai, mind flayers, and slaads. When the Chromatic Temple comes under attack, the githyanki move to make a stand in this chamber.

Tactical Encounter: Those Who Are About to Die (page 88).

13. Training Facilities

The githyanki use this bare room to spar and perform weapon maneuvers. The walls hold weapon racks, and the floor is broken up into fighting rings. Githwarriors are on guard here should the Chromatic Bastion come under attack.

Tactical Encounter: Those Who Are About to Die (page 88).

14. Gallery of Tempests

This room celebrates Tiamat in her blue dragon aspect. This room is also where the emperor passes judgment on those who disappoint him. He executes the disloyal and inept and discards their corpses in a charnel pit below.

Tactical Encounter: Vicious Storm (page 89).

15. The Emperor's Redoubt

The emperor claims the tower at the cathedral's rear. The tower has three levels, all of which are open so the emperor can see all levels at once. The tower is open at the top, and the emperor frequently comes and goes by this way.

Tactical Encounter: The Emperor's Redoubt (page 91).

Concluding the Adventure

When the characters defeat Zetch'r'r and his allies, an *astral skiff* descends through the roof and settles on the second floor. Vlaakith and several githyanki knights exit through the hatch. Vlaakith congratulates the adventurers on their victory and then starts looking for the *scepter of Ephelomon*. If the scepter was destroyed, she gathers the pieces. Otherwise, she asks the PCs for it. She then makes ready to leave, saying, "It's time to finish this." She then boards the *astral skiff* again. The characters can join her if they wish.

Vlaakith and her retinue head for the dragon caves at the opposite side of the city. Through the windows, the characters can see Tu'narath in flames, and fighting still rages in pockets. Not long after, the skiff descends and lands on a large floating rock amid the debris held by the red dragons. There, Vlaakith steps out and waits.

Moments later, an elder red dragon emerges from a cave followed by four more dragons of similar size. Before they have a chance to breathe, Vlaakith raises her hands to show them the scepter. She says the following:

"Children of Ephelomon, the pact is ended and your worthy service is no longer required."

If not already broken, she shatters the relic with a telekinetic attack. Otherwise, she drops the pieces to the ground.

The elder red dragon's eyes narrow for a moment and then it says, "You have been suitable partners these long years. It would be a waste to see you destroyed. We shall leave, but know this: When we next meet, it shall be as enemies." The elder dragon roars and lifts off, and the other dragons follow its lead. All across the shattered expanse, more dragons leave their caves, some carrying blackened eggs, others spitting fire, piercing the air with their screams. As dragons abandon the city in scores, the few remaining dragons fighting the Separatists take note and drop their riders to the city streets below before following their kin. Within minutes, the dragons vanish into the shimmering void, and the city is once more under githyanki control.

Vlaakith honors whatever agreements she made with the adventurers and stakes no claim to any treasures they extracted from the Chromatic Bastion. The characters are free to stay in the city for as long as they wish, but they will likely wish to return to the Coalition to report their success, and Vlaakith gladly has her servants open a portal to the natural world to facilitate the adventurers' return.

If the characters forged a short-term alliance, two githyanki generals accompany them to the natural world to work with the Coalition leaders to lend their service in the coming fight against Tiamat's armies. Otherwise, Vlaakith takes command of Tu'narath. She has the Chromatic Bastion razed, and she builds a new structure amid the red dragon caves as a sign of githyanki independence. Her first order of business after securing the city is to extend a hand of peace to the githzerai cousins. It has been too long, and old grudges have weakened her people. Those githzerai who accept the proffered peace eventually make the journey from the Elemental Chaos to find new lives amid their age-old enemies. A reunited people, they surrender their old identities of githyanki or githzerai and embrace a new culture as the gith.

Will Vlaakith restart the Eternal Crusade? Will she become a new threat against the mortal world, or will she leave it be as she scours other worlds for the hated illithid infestation? Or does she have some other design? The gith's fate is in your hands.

Appendix: Vehicles Summary

Vehicles are objects with special statistics, some of which are similar to those possessed by creatures. Unless otherwise mentioned, use the rules governing objects as described in the *Dungeon Master's Guide*. The following guidelines include information that applies to vehicles used in this adventure. For the full rules, see *Adventurer's Vault*, pages 14–17.

Size: Vehicles have sizes just like creatures.

Hit Points: A vehicle reduced to 0 hit points is destroyed, and creatures on board are knocked prone in their squares. The vehicle's wreckage occupies its space and counts as difficult terrain.

Space: Vehicles occupy all the space within its listed dimensions. Vehicles cannot squeeze.

Defenses: Like all objects, vehicles have an Armor Class, a Fortitude defense, and a Reflex defense. They do not have a Will defense.

Speed: A vehicle's speed determines how far it travels when a driver or pilot uses a move action. Using 2 move actions allows the vehicle to move twice its speed.

Pilot and Crew: Vehicles require a character to control it and a crew to help. Pilots usually operate the vehicle from the rear so when placing the vehicle on the map, decide which is the front and which is the rear.

A vehicle needs a pilot. Without one, the vehicle goes out of control and the statistics block describes what happens. Only one character can control a vehicle during a round, though any number of characters can attempt to take control until one is successful. A character can yield control to another character as a free action, but the character assuming control of the vehicle (also a free action) can take no other action with the vehicle during that turn. If a character does not move into the pilot position and assume control when it's yielded, the vehicle might go out of control unless some other character takes control.

Initiative: A vehicle never rolls for initiative and acts on the turn of the creature controlling it. If the vehicle is out-of-control, the vehicle's effective initiative check result is 1 lower than the last creature in the initiative order. For multiple out-of-control vehicles, the vehicles act in order of which has been out of control the longest.

Opportunity Attacks: A vehicle's movement does not provoke opportunity attacks against the vehicle or creature(s) occupying it. Creatures moving within still provoke opportunity attacks from other creatures in the same vehicle, as normal.

General Conditions: Vehicles can be attacked just like other objects. Some conditions have special rules (see below). If an effect allows a saving throw to end a condition, a vehicle makes one at the end of its controller's turn (or at the end of the vehicle's turn if out of control). A pilot can use a move action to allow a vehicle to make an additional saving throw during his or her turn.

Immobilized: An immobilized vehicle cannot move except by a pull, a push, or a slide.

Prone: A vehicle that would be knocked prone instead takes 1d10 damage and is slowed (see below) until the end of the next round.

Restrained: A restrained vehicle is immobilized and cannot be forced to move by a pull, a push, or a slide effect. If the restrained condition is ended by the escape action, the vehicle uses the pilot's relevant skill modifier.

Slowed: The vehicle's speed is reduced to 2, as normal.

Out of Control: A pilot must use specific actions to steer, move, or stop a vehicle. In any round in which no character uses actions to control the vehicle, a vehicle is out of control (see statistics block).

Crashing and Ramming: If a vehicle tries to move into a space occupied by an object, a creature, or another vehicle, it crashes. The vehicle and whatever hits it take 1d10 damage per square the vehicle moved in its previous turn. Creatures on board (and those on board the object it hits) take half damage.

If the target of the crash is more than one size category smaller than the out-of-control vehicle, the vehicle continues to move regardless of how much damage it dealt during the crash. The space the target occupies is treated as difficult terrain for the vehicle's movement.

Against targets of equal or greater size, the vehicle continues to move only if the target is destroyed. If not destroyed, the vehicle's move ends immediately.

Turning and Heading: Every vehicle has a heading—the direction it currently moves. To track a vehicle's heading, place a token along the front edge of the vehicle's space on the battle grid. When a vehicle moves, uses the marker to count off squares in the direction the vehicle is moving, and then move the vehicle counter or miniature to catch up.

Drive: Move Action. Move the vehicle a distance up to its speed. When you move the vehicle, it must move in the direction of its heading marker. The vehicle can move directly forward or it can move along either forward diagonal adjacent to its heading marker. It cannot move in other directions without making a turn. A vehicle's movement does not provoke opportunity attacks against the vehicle or the creatures on it. Terrain affects a vehicle in the same way that it affects creatures.

Turn: Move Action. Move the vehicle a distance equal to half its speed. When you move the vehicle, it must move in the direction of its heading marker. The vehicle can move directly forward or it can move along either forward diagonal adjacent to its heading marker. At any point during the vehicle's movement, move its heading marker from its current position to either side of the vehicle. Reorient the vehicle's counter or miniature accordingly at the end of the move. Otherwise, this action follows the rules for the drive action (above).

Stop: Move Action. Move the vehicle forward a number of squares equal to the distance it moved in the previous round. At the end of the move, the vehicle is motionless. A vehicle begins moving again when the pilot uses the drive action. A stopped vehicle does not go out of control while motionless unless otherwise noted in its description. The vehicles' heading marker remains in place. If and when the vehicle moves again, it must initially move in this direction.

Mayhem's Plight

Encounter Level 18 (10,200 XP)

Setup

2 blood fiends (B)
Mayhem (M)

Mayhem is confronted by two ravenous blood fiends. The abominations happily engage anyone that interferes.

The path emerges from the petrified forest and climbs to a smoking cleft in the mountainside. Standing on the road, and looking quite terrified, is a tall blue-skinned humanoid dressed in fine robes. Two muscular four-armed humanoids with blood red skin and long claws and fangs threaten the traveler from mountain ledges.

2 Blood Fiends (B) **Level 23 Soldier**
Medium elemental humanoid XP 5,100 each

Initiative +21 **Senses** Perception +23; darkvision
HP 220; **Bloodied** 110
AC 41; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32
Immune fear
Speed 8, fly 10

⊕ **Claws** (standard; at-will)
+28 vs. AC; 2d8 + 10 damage.

⊕ **Bloodthirsty Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Healing**
Requires combat advantage; +28 vs. AC; 1d8 + 10 damage, and the target is grabbed and takes ongoing 10 damage. Also, the blood fiend regains 10 hit points.

Terror Gaze (minor; at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Close blast 3; +24 vs. Will; the target is immobilized (save ends).

Combat Advantage
The blood fiend gains combat advantage against any living, bloodied enemy.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Primordial
Skills Intimidate +24
Str 30 (+21) **Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 24 (+18)
Con 28 (+20) **Int** 22 (+17) **Cha** 27 (+19)

Mayhem the Raavasta (M) **Level 19 Lurker**
Medium elemental humanoid (shapechanger) XP 2,400

Initiative +19 **Senses** Perception +18; truesight 6
HP 136; **Bloodied** 68
AC 32; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 33
Resist 10 psychic, 10 variable (3/encounter; see "Resist," *Monster Manual*, page 282)
Speed 8

⊕ **Claws of Blindness** (standard; at-will)
+23 vs. AC; 1d6 + 6 damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Mind Scramble (standard; recharges when first bloodied or when Mayhem scores a critical hit with *claws of blindness*) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +22 vs. Will; 1d10 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed and takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends both).

Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
Mayhem can alter its physical form to take on the appearance of any Medium humanoid, including a unique individual.

Cloak and Claw
Mayhem's attacks deal 2d6 extra damage against a target against which it has total concealment.

Vanish (immediate reaction, when an enemy hits Mayhem; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Illusion**
Mayhem shifts 3 squares and is invisible until the end of its next turn or until it makes an attack.

Alignment Evil **Languages** All
Skills Bluff +21, Stealth +20
Str 15 (+11) **Dex** 22 (+15) **Wis** 18 (+13)
Con 16 (+12) **Int** 19 (+13) **Cha** 24 (+16)
Equipment fine clothing

Tactics

The blood fiends focus their attacks on Mayhem until the PCs join the combat. One closes to use *terror gaze*, while the second moves in to make an attack with its claws, leaping from a ledge to put itself between the PCs and their prey. If the characters attack, both blood fiends abandon Mayhem and use *terror gaze* to pin down their enemies and then close to savage them with their claws. Once they bloody an enemy, they go for the kill, using their *bloodthirsty bite* attacks.

Mayhem plays the part of the hapless victim for 1 round. If the PCs have yet to help him by the start of the second round, the next time he's hit by an attack, he uses *vanish* to cover his retreat. If prevented, he uses *mind scramble* against a blood fiend and tries to withdraw to the cleft. He flees if he's bloodied.

Features of the Area

Cliffs: Climbing up or down the rock faces requires a DC 14 Athletics check. A fall from the cliff below the path causes the character to roll down the mountain side, moving 1d20 squares and taking 1d10 damage for every 2 squares moved before coming to a stop.

Vents: Fissures in the mountain near the cleft (marked V1, V2, V3, and V4 on the map) occasionally burst hot, poisonous steam. On initiative count 10, roll 1d4 to determine which vent attacks.

Vented Steam ✦ Fire, Poison
Close blast 3; +21 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 6 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire and poison damage (save ends).

Sulfurous Smoke: All spaces adjacent to the cleft are lightly obscured, while spaces in the cloud or in the cleft are heavily obscured.

Finding Tu'narath

Encounter Level 19 (12,000 XP)

Setup

To secure a route to the githyanki city, the PCs must negotiate Citadel Mercane for leads. You should run this skill challenge as the adventurers explore and investigate the Bazaar. This skill challenge is unusual in that even failed checks can reveal routes to Tu'narath. These options are more dangerous and risk much, but they are as viable as geting a victory with the skill challenge. Many failures, as shown below, include links to side-treks. If characters follow-up on these, turn to the indicated page for details on what happens.

Finding Tu'narath **Level 19**
Skill Challenge XP 12,000

The air hums with conversation, and in the crowds you see any number of useful types who might aid you in your mission.

The PCs listen and interact with locals to discover possible routes to Tu'narath. This skill challenge takes at least 6 hours.

Complexity
5 (12 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Bluff, Diplomacy, Endurance, History, Insight, Intimidate.

Other Skills
Streetwise.

Victory
The characters arrange a meeting with Captain J'ladimir, a Separatist sympathizer. He stands as the best and most certain route to Tu'narath. Proceed to "The Sympathizer" on page 36.

Defeat
If the characters haven't yet found a way to reach Tu'narath by one of the challenge's failures, they must begin the skill challenge again.

Special
If the PCs rescued and befriended Mayhem, they gain a +2 bonus to all skill checks related to the skill challenge.

Bluff DC 22
The PCs adopt cover stories and use them to find a way to the githyanki city.
Requires a successful Streetwise check.
The first failure turns up a name for someone who might help: Scaramandar. The failed check opens up the advanced Streetwise 1 option. The PCs cannot make any more Bluff checks until they succeed on another Streetwise check.

Diplomacy DC 22
The adventurers negotiate for passage, hinting at their mission and seeking sympathizers.
The PCs cannot make any more Diplomacy checks until they get another success with Streetwise.

Endurance DC 22 (4 successes maximum; see below)
The PCs spend time carousing in the hopes loose lips might reveal a clue.
On a failed check, a nearby barfly suggests the characters should just steal a ship. The failed check opens up the advanced Streetwise 2 check.

History DC 27
The PCs recall and mention a particularly bloodthirsty githyanki raid so that they can attempt to weaken bonds of loyalty or foment feelings of vengeance in people around them.
A successful check can negate one failure instead of granting a success.

Intimidate DC 22
The PCs use threats to pressure locals to cough up a way to the city.
If failed, in addition to counting as a failure, the first failed check reveals a name of someone who might help. Taikus, a githzerai black marketer, sometimes smuggles goods into Tu'narath. This failure opens up advanced Streetwise 3. The PCs cannot make any more Intimidate checks until they succeed on another Streetwise check.

Streetwise DC 22
The PCs explore the Citadel, listening to rumors, asking questions, and generally feeling the pulse of the city.
Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill. In addition to counting as a success, a successful check opens up the Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate skills.

Advanced Streetwise 1 DC 27 (0 successes or failures)
The PCs ask around about Scaramandar and learn he is a fixer and problem-solver. He has a dubious reputation and is a known double-crosser, but he might aid them in reaching Tu'narath. If the characters follow this lead, they get an audience. Go to "Dealing with the Devil" on page 34.
Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill.

Advanced Streetwise 2 DC 22 (0 successes or failures)
A little investigation into suitable vehicles to steal comes up with the name Merciless. *If the characters follow this lead, they find the vessel with little trouble. See "Merciless" on page 36.*
Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill.

Advanced Streetwise 3 DC 22 (0 successes or failures)
The PCs learn Taikus is still in the city and he might be willing to help. If the characters follow this lead, they find directions to his warehouse. Proceed with "Shortcuts through the Void" on page 36.
Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill.

Demons Among Us

Encounter Level 20 (14,400 XP)

Setup

3 goristro slaves (G)

Three hulking goristro demons escaped their handlers by killing them. Free, they vent their rage at innocent bystanders and will not stop until destroyed.

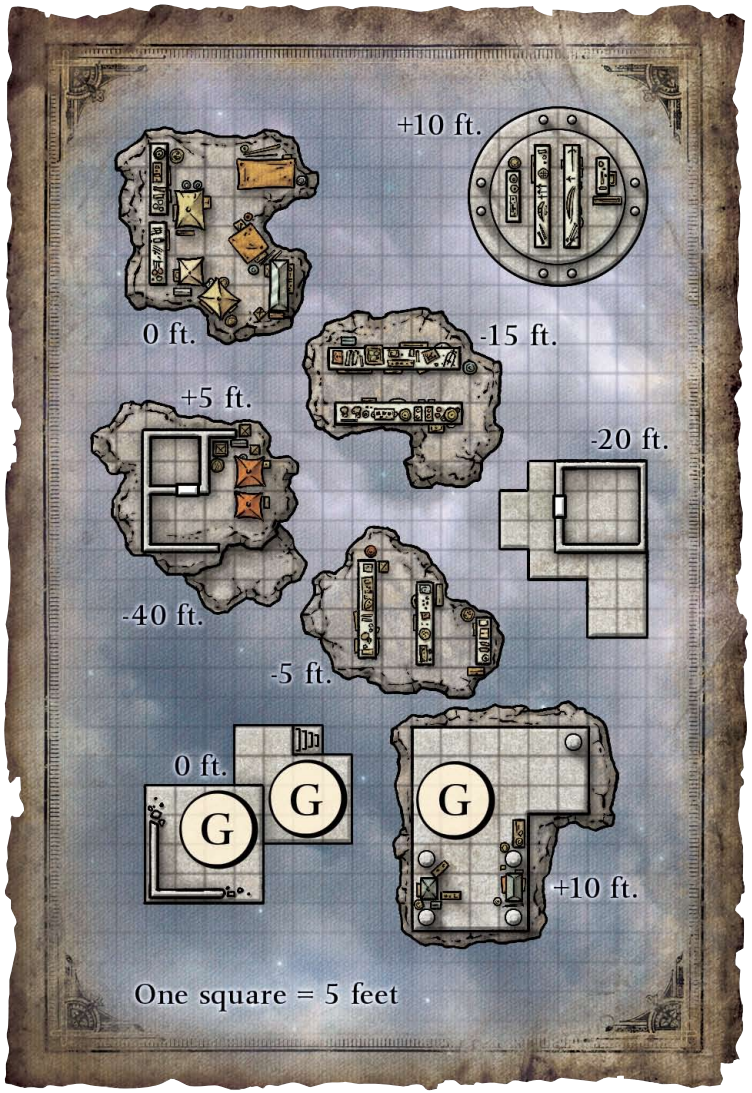
While the PCs explore the market, read:

Screams pierce the Bazaar's steady hum, presaging a mad rush. Through the fleeing people, you see a massive demon leap from one ruined stall to land on another. It whips its chain about, decapitating three too-slow patrons. Two more demons bound into the scene, roaring and screeching in rage.

3 Goristro Slaves (G)	**Level 19 Elite Brute**
Huge elemental humanoid (demon)	XP 4,800 each
Initiative +10	**Senses** Perception +17; darkvision
HP 450; **Bloodied** 225; see also *raging frenzy*	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29	
Resist 20 variable (2/encounter; see "Resist," *Monster Manual,* 282)	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will)	
Reach 3; +22 vs. AC; 2d10 + 8 damage.	
↟ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)	
The goristro makes two slam attacks.	
↟ **Goristro Stomp** (immediate reaction, when a nonadjacent enemy moves adjacent to the goristro; recharge ⚅ ⚅ ⚅)	
The goristro attacks the triggering enemy: +22 vs. AC; 4d8 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and knocked prone.	
↟ **Raging Frenzy** (immediate reaction, when attacked by an adjacent enemy while bloodied; at-will)	
Targets triggering enemy: +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage.	
↝ **Lashing Chains** (standard; at-will)	
Ranged 5; +22 vs. AC; 3d10 + 8 damage, and the target is grabbed. *Effect:* One other creature grabbed by the goristro slides to a space adjacent to the target of the attack, takes 15 damage, and is no longer grabbed.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Abyssal
Str 27 (+17)	**Dex** 12 (+10) **Wis** 17 (+12)
Con 25 (+16)	**Int** 6 (+7) **Cha** 12 (+10)
Equipment chains	

Tactics

The demons are enraged and attack anything that comes too close. A demon uses *lashing chains* against the first enemy to come in its range, and then uses the attack again against a different target by spending an action point. If a PC closes on the demon, it uses *goristro stomp* or, if waiting for the power to recharge, it hammers its foe with *double attack*. The demons fight until destroyed.



Features of the Area

Crowds: During the first round, the characters have cover from the patrons in the Bazaar, but each square a character moves closer to the demons counts as difficult terrain due to the press of fleeing people. During the second round, this environmental effect ends and the PCs are free to move about normally.

Floating Stands: The battlefield consists of several floating stands. Because the PCs are on the Astral Sea, they can fly up to half their speed and hover in place. Since they are clumsy fliers, such characters take a −4 penalty to attack rolls and defenses while flying. A character can choose not to fly and instead jump, making an Athletics check as normal to cross the gaps (*Player's Handbook*, page 182).

Tents: Many floating stands contain tents. A character inside a tent has total concealment.

Walls: Some floating stands contain walls. Characters behind them gain cover.

Development

Starting on the fifth round and every 2 rounds thereafter until the end of the encounter, three marut blademasters (*Monster Manual*, page 185) join the fight to help contain the demons. These combatants do not attack the PCs unless the PCs attack them. If a fight breaks out between the PCs and the maruts, see the "Running Afoul of the Law" sidebar on page 57 for further developments.

Conclusion

Once the last demon falls, the Bazaar's commerce resumes as if nothing had happened. The dead drift away and are eventually picked up by locals for rendering into candles and food, but not before they are picked clean of valuables. As the characters recover, Trethrix of the Seven Diamonds appears at their side. A beautiful woman, svelte and appealing, she smiles and thanks the adventurers for their selfless service. As a reward, she gifts them with treasure parcel 5. After she honors the characters, she returns to her palanquin to continue her shopping.

The Devil's Bargain

Encounter Level 19+ (12,600 XP)

Setup

4 marut escorts (M)
Trethrix (T)

Periodically one of the Seven Diamonds travels the Bazaar to assert that they are the true masters and to encourage commerce. The most recent Diamond to explore the Bazaar is Trethrix. A raavasta, she is thoroughly evil, but she has no special complaint against the adventurers and thus is not prepared for an attack against her.

This encounter occurs only if the adventurers move to assassinate the merchant to gain access to Tu'narath. The best time to strike is when she awaits the portal to open to the Inner Sphere. The adventurers should have plenty of time to scout the area and set up their ambush.

When the PCs can see this scene, read:

A beautiful woman reclines on a palanquin. Standing at each corner is a gray-skinned humanoid wielding a greatsword. The group waits before a shuddering gate ringed with bright glyphs set on the Inner Sphere's surface.

4 Marut Escorts (M) **Level 19 Minion Soldier**
Medium immortal humanoid XP 600 each

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +20; truesight 10
HP 1; a minion never takes damage from a miss.
AC 34; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 32
Immune sleep; **Resist** 10 thunder
Speed 8, fly 4 (hover), teleport 4

⨁ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder, Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 12 damage plus 3 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Hardy Minion (when the marut escort is hit by an attack; at-will)
Roll 1d6. On a 5 or 6, the marut takes no damage from the attack.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Str 30 (+19) **Dex** 21 (+14) **Wis** 23 (+15)
Con 23 (+15) **Int** 12 (+10) **Cha** 13 (+10)
Equipment greatsword

Trethrix (T) **Level 23 Elite Controller**
Medium elemental humanoid (shapechanger), raavasta XP 10,200

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +22; truesight 6
HP 428; **Bloodied** 214
AC 40; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 36
Resist 15 psychic, 15 variable (2/encounter; see "Resist," *Monster Manual*, page 282)
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⨁ **Beguiling Claws** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Charm**
+26 vs. AC; 1d6 + 5 damage, and the target is blinded (save ends).

Bind (minor; recharges when *enforce contract* is used) ✦ **Charm, Psychic**
Ranged sight; no attack roll required; the target chooses to take ongoing 20 psychic damage (save ends) or be dominated (save ends); see also *enforce contract*.

Mind Stab (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear, Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +28 vs. Will; 5d6 + 9 psychic damage, and the target moves its speed away from Trethrix.

Change Shape (minor; at-will) ✦ **Polymorph**
Trethrix can alter its physical form to take on the appearance of any Medium humanoid, including a unique individual (see "Change Shape," *Monster Manual*, page 280).

Enforce Contract (immediate reaction, when an enemy's melee or ranged attack targets Trethrix; recharges when *bind* is used) ✦ **Charm**
The attack targets the creature affected by Trethrix's *bind* power instead of Trethrix. Using this power ends the *bind* effect on that creature.

Vanish (immediate reaction, when an enemy hits Trethrix; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Illusion**
Trethrix shifts 3 squares and is invisible until the end of its next turn or until it attacks.

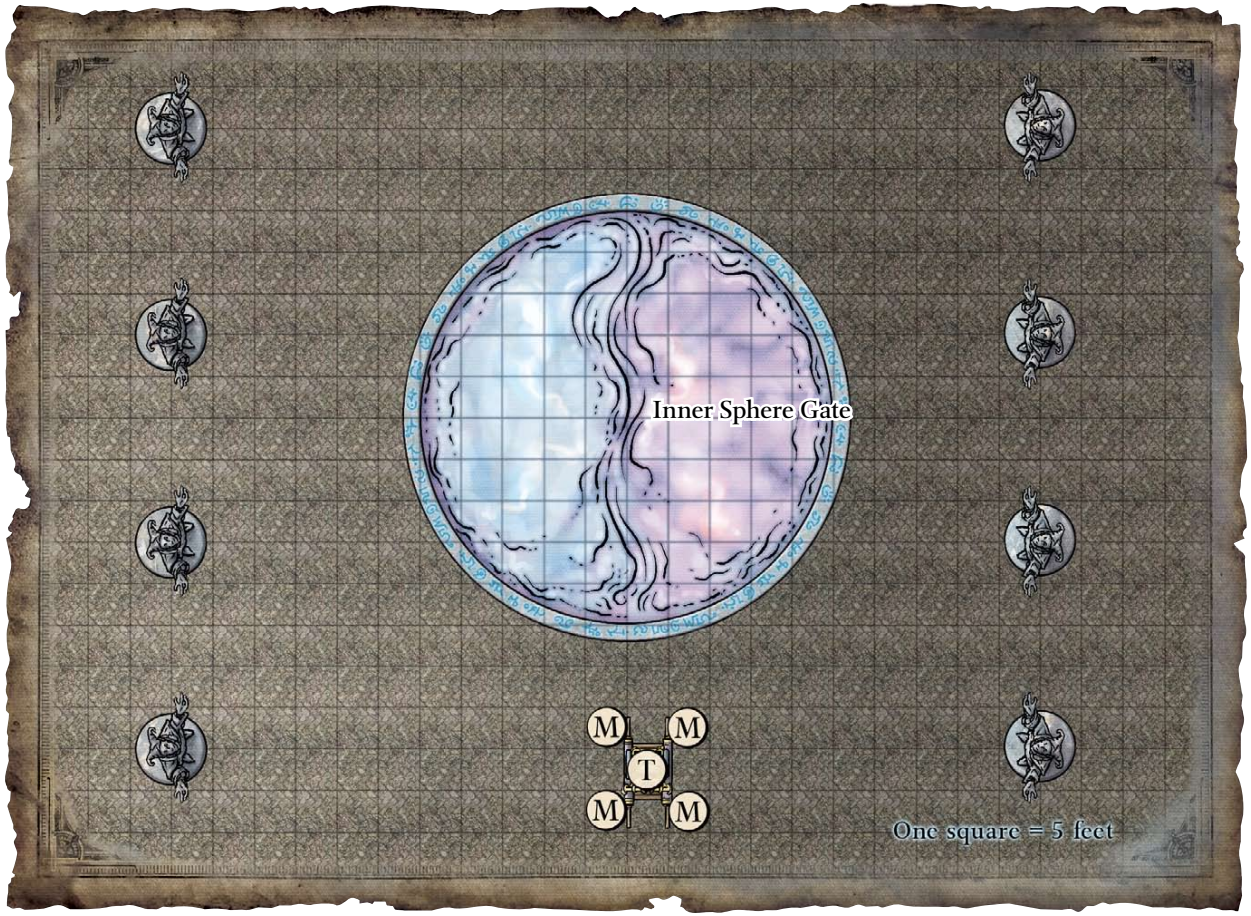
Alignment Evil **Languages** All
Skills Bluff +23, Diplomacy +23, Insight +22
Str 14 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+16) **Wis** 23 (+17)
Con 22 (+17) **Int** 28 (+20) **Cha** 25 (+18)
Equipment fine clothing

Tactics

The marut escorts form a defensive perimeter around the raavasta to block attempts by enemies to reach their charge. When a foe closes, the maruts use their greatswords to throw back the attacker. They follow Trethrix as she moves about to avoid the PCs' attacks.

While her minions move to protect her, Trethrix uses *bind* against a tough defender. If the target opts to become dominated, she compels it to make basic attacks against its allies. If she comes under attack, she safeguards herself by using *enforce contract*, at which point she chooses a different target to *bind*. If two or more PCs close on her, she uses *mind stab* to drive them off and spends an action point to hit a target she misses with her *beguiling claws*. If she drops to 100 hit points or fewer, she uses *vanish* to make an escape if possible.

The marut blademasters that come through the portal (see "Development" on the next page) close on the closest enemy, fighting their way to the raavasta's side using teleport if necessary. Once there, they take up the roles her escorts performed and fight to the death defending the fiend.



Features of the Area

Inner Sphere Gate: A massive gate leads to Citadel Mercane's interior. It takes 5 minutes to open or close the gate fully due to its great weight. The gate is made from adamantine and has an AC 2, other defenses 20; resist 20 all; hp 1,000. Breaching the gate allows access to the Inner Sphere (page 33).

Statues: Eight 20-foot-tall statues in two rows of four stand to either side of the portal. The statue has an AC 2, Fortitude 20, Reflex 2, hp 400. If a statue takes 50 or more damage, blue blood sprays in a continuous close blast 3 in the direction from the attack. The blood is harmless, but it grants concealment to creatures standing in the blast.

Lightning Ward: To protect the inner sphere, the Society of Seven Diamonds placed powerful wards around their gates. The lightning ward attacks when any natural creature enters a space adjacent to the ward.

⊗ Lightning Ward ✦ Lightning
Melee 1; +22 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 7 lightning damage, and the target is pushed 1d4 squares and is dazed until the end of its next turn.

Palanquin: Trethrix rides on a levitating palanquin.

Trethrix's Palanquin		
Medium vehicle		
HP 30	**Space** 1 square	**Cost** 1,800 gp
AC 5; **Fortitude** 10, **Reflex** 5		
Speed fly 4 (hover)		
Pilot		
The pilot must maintain concentration (minor action) or the palanquin goes out of control.		
Load		
One Medium creature; 100 pounds of gear.		
Out of Control		
An out-of-control palanquin comes to a stop at the beginning of its turn.		
Compact		
An adjacent creature can fold up an unoccupied palanquin as a standard action into a tiny object.		

Treasure: Trethrix carries treasure parcel 10 on her person.

Development

After the third round, the gate is wide enough for one marut blademaster to join the fight. Every other round thereafter, another two join the battle. This continues until five blademasters emerge.

Marut Blademaster		**Level 21 Soldier**
Medium immortal humanoid		XP 3,200
Initiative +18	**Senses** Perception +22; truesight 10	
HP 201; **Bloodied** 100		
AC 37; **Fortitude** 37, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 33		
Immune sleep; **Resist** 10 thunder		
Speed 8, fly 4 (hover), teleport 4		
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder, Weapon**		
+27 vs. AC; 1d10 + 11 damage plus 1d6 thunder damage, the target is pushed 1 square, and the target is marked until the end of the marut blademaster's next turn.		
⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder, Weapon**		
The marut blademaster makes two greatsword attacks.		
Alignment Unaligned	**Languages** Supernal	
Skills Endurance +22, Intimidate +17		
Str 32 (+21)	**Dex** 23 (+16)	**Wis** 25 (+17)
Con 25 (+17)	**Int** 14 (+12)	**Cha** 15 (+12)
Equipment greatsword		

Characters who fail to kill Trethrix and flee into the Bazaar are hunted for the remainder of their stay here. See "Running Afoul of the Law" on page 34 for further developments.

Conclusion

After killing the raavasta, the PCs can move to the appointed place. A rakshasa proxy working for Scaramandar gives them a ritual scroll, the sigil address, and residuum enough to perform the ritual. Depending on how the PCs' mission went, they might need to retreat farther up into the mountain to escape vengeance-seeking maruts. They could, while there, face additional encounters as described on page 31. Completing the ritual, though, transports the adventurers to Tu'narath as the cambion promised.

STOLEN MERCY

Encounter Level 19 (12,000 XP)

SETUP

2 githyanki mates (M)
4 githyanki pirates (P)
Ri'sʼan (R)

The *Merciless* is an *astral skiff* docked at the end of Pier Nine. Having taken substantial damage during an ill-advised raid into Hestavar, the ship limped to Citadel Mercane for repairs. The vessel is inviting to thieves because of its isolation and the lack of goodwill earned by the ship's crew. In fact, should the ship and its crew come under attack, no one comes to their aid.

When the PCs enter Pier Nine, read:

Docks stretch out all along the metal pier, many of which hold astral vessels in all sorts of shapes and sizes. As you near the end, the ships thin out until there are none for the final 100 or so feet. At the very end, you spy the Merciless, a sleek ship with an enclosed deck equipped with patched sails and long navigation rods sprouting from the hull. Hatches grant access to its interior and crystalline portals might provide a glimpse into its interior.

An observation deck towers over the ship, with metal rungs ascending to a hatch at the deck's bottom.

Ri'sʼan and the two pirates recline on the observation deck, while the surviving pirates make the final preparations for departure. The githyanki don't expect an attack and so they are not watching from the deck. The pirates work inside the vessel, so it takes a DC 13 Stealth check to approach the ship unnoticed.

4 Githyanki Pirates (P) **Level 19 Minion Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 600 each

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +13
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 34; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 30
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5; see also *telekinetic jump*

Silver Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 16 psychic damage, and the target is marked until the end of the githyanki's next turn.

Crossbow (standard; recharges when the githyanki spends a minor action to reload the weapon) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +26 vs. AC; 16 damage.

Telekinetic Jump (move; encounter)
The githyanki flies 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 25 (+16) **Dex** 22 (+15) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 14 (+11) **Int** 15 (+11) **Cha** 14 (+11)
Equipment chainmail, light shield, silver longsword, crossbow with 10 bolts

2 Githyanki Mates (M) **Level 19 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid XP 2,400 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +13
HP 177; **Bloodied** 88
AC 33; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 30
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5; see also *astral stride*

Silver Longsword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+24 vs. AC; 1d8 + 8 damage plus 1d8 psychic damage, and the githyanki mate shifts 1 square.

Astral Dagger (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Psychic**
Ranged 10; +24 vs. AC; 1d6 + 8 force damage plus 1d6 psychic damage.

Merciless Cut (standard; requires silver longsword; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Targets a dazed or stunned creature; +24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage plus 2d8 psychic damage, and a dazed target is stunned instead of dazed (save ends).

Psychic Assault (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Psychic**
Close blast 3; +22 vs. Will; 1d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

Astral Stride (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The githyanki pirate teleports 6 squares and gains the insubstantial and phasing qualities until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 22 (+15) **Dex** 25 (+16) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 17 (+12) **Int** 20 (+14) **Cha** 14 (+11)
Equipment chainmail, silver longsword

Ri'sʼan (R) **Level 19 Elite Artillery (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 4,800

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +19
HP 270; **Bloodied** 135
AC 31; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 34
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against charm effects)
Speed 6; see also *astral stride*
Action Points 1

Psychic Blade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Psychic**
+24 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 force damage plus 1d6 psychic damage.

Hurled Blade (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force, Psychic**
Ranged 15; +26 vs. AC; 1d8 + 8 force damage plus 1d8 psychic damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
Ri'sʼan makes two *hurled blade* attacks, or one *psychic blade* attack, shifts, and makes a *hurled blade* attack.

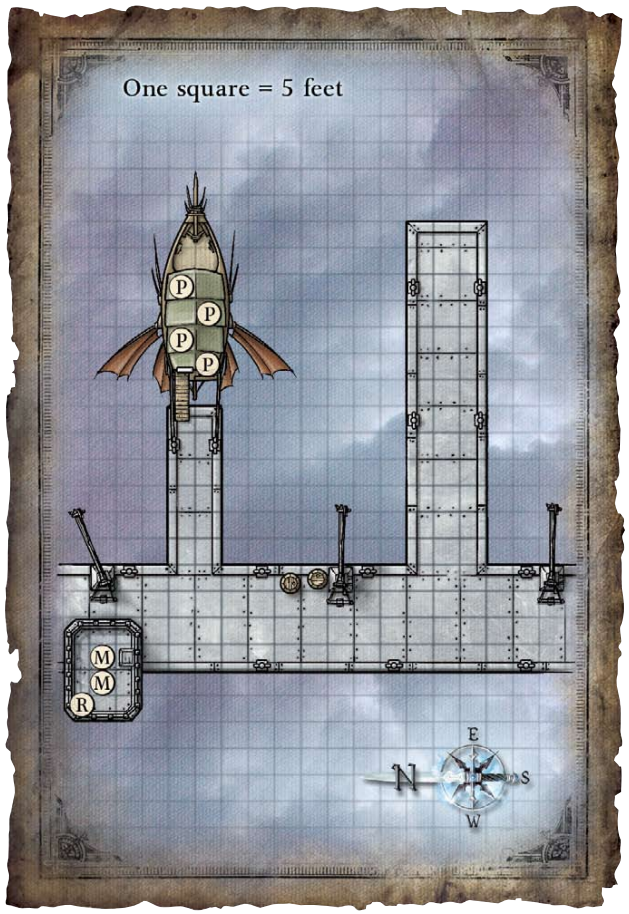
Githyanki Tactics (move; at-will)
Ranged 5; targets one githyanki Ri'sʼan can see; the target slides 5 squares.

Psychic Spear (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Force, Psychic**
Ranged 20; +26 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 force damage plus 2d8 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Psychic Scream (immediate reaction, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +22 vs. Will; 4d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not dazed.

Astral Stride (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ri'sʼan teleports 6 squares and gains the insubstantial and phasing qualities until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +17, History +14, Insight +19, Intimidate +21
Str 19 (+13) **Dex** 22 (+15) **Wis** 20 (+14)
Con 15 (+11) **Int** 17 (+12) **Cha** 25 (+16)
Equipment chainmail



Tactics

The githyanki pirates shout for Captain Ri'sʼan if an adventurer opens a hatch, thus raising the alarm. Otherwise, the pirates are oblivious to combat outside the skiff until the start of round 3 when one finally comes out from the craft and sees the fight.

Once alerted, three of the githyanki pirates take their stations, while the fourth spends a move action to move the ship 3 squares and turn it broadside to bring the pier into its firing arc. The pirates fire at the PCs using their crossbows.

The githyanki mates lead the attack, either using *astral stride* to engage the PCs on the pier below or fighting PCs who engage them at the platform. They use *psychic assault* first followed by *merciless cut*.

Ri'sʼan fights from the observation deck, using his *double attack* to support his mates and *psychic spear* to pin down enemy defenders. Ri'sʼan doesn't engage the PCs in melee unless he is the only thing between them and his ship, at which point he closes the distance with *astral stride* and directs his *psychic blade* attacks at controllers and leaders first.

Features of the Area

Observation Deck: The observation deck stands 30 feet above the pier and has an open top. With subjective gravity, PCs can fly to the top using the normal rules for navigating the Astral Sea (page 57). Or, a character can climb the ladder up to the hatch with a DC 0 Athletics check.

The *Merciless*: The vessel is an *astral skiff*.

Merciless
Gargantuan vehicle (*astral skiff*)

HP 250 **Space** 2 squares by 6 squares **Cost** 13,000 gp
AC 4; **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 2
Speed fly 12 (hover), overland flight 15

Pilot
The pilot must stand at a control wheel, typically at the rear of the *astral skiff*.

Crew
In addition to the pilot, an *astral skiff* requires a crew of three, all of whom use a standard action each round to control the skiff. Reduce the skiff's fly speed by 4 squares for each missing crewmember. At fly speed 0, the *Merciless* sails out of control.

Load
Ten Medium creatures; one ton of cargo

Out of Control
An out-of-control *astral skiff* moves forward at half speed (not including any modifiers for its astral sails).

Astral Attunement
The *astral skiff* functions only in the Astral Sea.

Fragile Propulsion
For every 25 damage the *Merciless* takes, its speed is reduced by 2 squares. At fly speed 0, the ship comes to a stop.

The ship provides superior cover to creatures inside. Two portals on each side allow occupants to make attacks against enemies outside the vessel.

Treasure: The characters gain treasure parcel 20, which includes the *Merciless*. In addition, planar charts reveal a quick route to Tu'narath through a nearby color veil.

Secret Way

Encounter Level 19 (12,000 XP)

Setup

Negotiated Passage (Skill Challenge)
2 angels of Tiamat's vengeance
Taikus (T)

Along the way to the warehouse, two angels of Tiamat's vengeance, who have been watching the characters, follow them to the site. About 5 minutes before the characters arrive, both angels—from as far away as you like—target two PCs with *sign of vengeance*. Since this sign is invisible and harmless, the character doesn't notice it. However, a DC 29 Arcana check reveals its general presence and nature. A DC 25 Religion check identifies its source.

When the PCs enter the warehouse, read:

Wooden crates stand in piles forming three rows extending to the warehouse's far wall. Aside from these goods and dust floating through the air, the place seems empty.

Taikus has a permanent portal linking Tu'narath to Citadel Mercane inside an extradimensional space hidden at the back of the warehouse. When the characters enter the building, Taikus is inside the extradimensional space. He emerges 2 rounds later. Characters searching the warehouse can find the extradimensional space with a DC 29 Arcana check or a DC 27 Perception check. If the characters find the space while the githzerai is still inside, the PCs take a –2 penalty to all Diplomacy checks made as part of the "Negotiated Passage" skill challenge.

Negotiated Passage **Level 19**
Skill Challenge XP 2,400

The githzerai watches you with suspicion, uncertain of your motives.

The adventurers must convince Taikus that they aim to help the Separatists. This skill challenge takes a few minutes.

Complexity
1 (4 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills
Bluff, Diplomacy, Insight.

Other Skills
History, Intimidate.

Victory
Taikus leads the PCs to the extradimensional space, but before the PCs reach it, the angels of Tiamat's vengeance attack.

Defeat
Taikus denies the PCs access to the portal. Before the characters have a chance to react, the angels of Tiamat's vengeance attack, further damning the PCs in the githzerai's eyes.

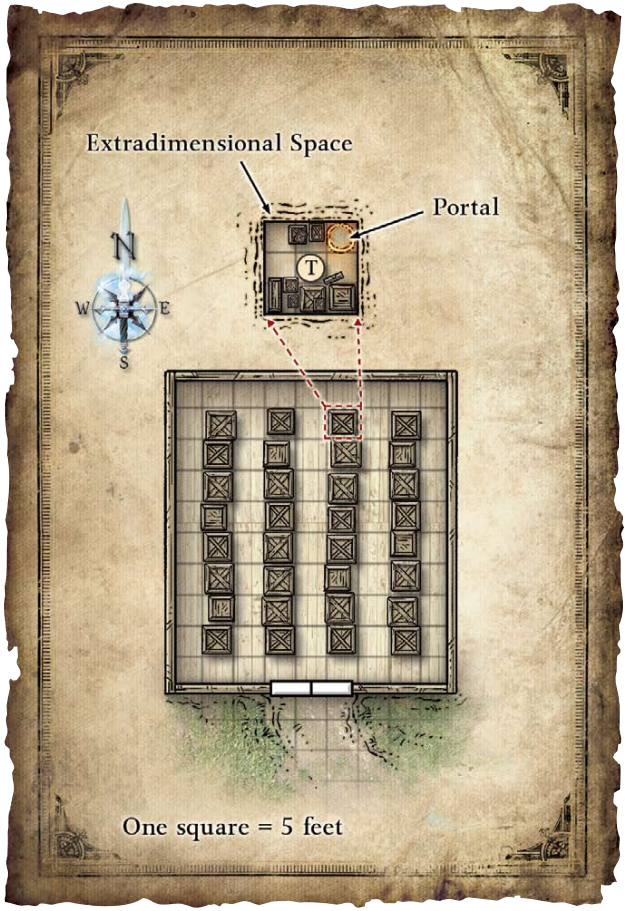
Bluff (DC 22)
The PC gives a false reason for wanting to reach Tu'narath. A failed check here results in two failures.

Diplomacy (DC 22)
The characters explain their mission and ask for aid. The first success makes available the History check.

History (DC 22; Requires a successful Diplomacy check)
A PC recalls some of the worst raids and excesses by the githyanki, relating these tales to his or her mission and how the group intends to stop future attacks.

Insight (DC 22)
A PC senses the githzerai is nervous and catches him throwing a glance to an innocuous stack of crates (he's looking at the entrance to the extradimensional space). This check also reveals that Intimidate does not work on Taikus.

Intimidate (DC 30)
Taikus is not easily moved by threats. Each failed Intimidate check applies a -5 penalty to all future checks made as part of this skill challenge.



When Taikus appears, read:

Stepping out from around a stack is a rail-thin githzerai wearing a tattered cloak. He looks at you with a raised eyebrow, "Can I help you?"

2 Angels of Tiamat's Vengeance **Level 19 Elite Brute**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) XP 4,800 each
Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 446; **Bloodied** 223
AC 34; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 33; see also *chromatic cloak*
Immune disease, fear; **Resist** 15 radiant; 15 variable (3/encounter, acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison only; see "Resist," *Monster Manual*, page 282), see also *coldfire pillar*
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover); see also *sign of vengeance*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison, Weapon**
Reach 2; +25 vs. AC; 1d10 + 9 damage plus 1d8 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage plus 1d8 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will)
The angel of vengeance makes two longsword attacks.

Sign of Vengeance (minor; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged sight; the angel of vengeance places an invisible sign upon the target. Until the end of the encounter, as a move action, the angel can teleport adjacent to the target.

Chromatic Pillar (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire Lightning, Poison, Polymorph**
The angel transforms into a 30-foot-high pillar of draconic energies. Close burst 2; +23 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 9 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage plus 1d8 + 9 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage. The angel of Tiamat's vengeance is immune to all damage until the start of its next turn.

Chromatic Cloak (until bloodied) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison**
Attacks against the angel of vengeance take a –2 penalty until the angel is bloodied. While *cloak of vengeance* is in effect, a creature that makes a successful melee attack against the angel takes 1d8 acid or cold damage and 1d8 fire, lightning, or poison damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Insight +21, Intimidate +22
Str 27 (+17) **Dex** 18 (+13) **Wis** 25 (+16)
Con 23 (+15) **Int** 19 (+13) **Cha** 26 (+17)
Equipment plate armor, 2 longswords

Taikus (T) **Level 15 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid, githzerai XP 2,400
Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 282; **Bloodied** 141
AC 31; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 30; see also *iron mind*
Saving Throws +2
Speed 7
Action Points 1

⊕ **Unarmed Strike** (standard; at-will)
+20 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage.

Inner Spark (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Teleportation**
Ranged 5; +18 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 4 lightning damage, and the target teleports 5 squares to an unoccupied space of Taikus's choosing.

Reorder Chaos (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged sight; up to 4 Medium or smaller targets; +19 vs. Fortitude; the targets teleport to swap spaces as Taikus chooses.

Trace Chance (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
Ranged 5; no attack roll required; the next melee attack made against the target gains a +5 power bonus to the attack roll, and, if it hits, it is automatically a critical hit.

Psychic Fists (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +19 vs. Will; 1d8 + 4 psychic damage.

Avenging Wind (immediate interrupt, when targeted by a ranged attack; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The attack targets another creature within 5 squares of Taikus, and Taikus teleports 10 squares into a square adjacent to the attacker.

Iron Mind (immediate interrupt, when Taikus would be hit by an attack; encounter)
Taikus gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until end of his next turn.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Acrobatics +20, Athletics +18, Insight +18
Str 19 (+11) **Dex** 23 (+13) **Wis** 23 (+13)
Con 13 (+8) **Int** 15 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+9)

Tactics

The angels teleport into spaces adjacent to the adventurers whom they targeted with *sign of vengeance* and then make *double attacks* each round.

Taikus uses *trace chance* at the earliest opportunity and spends his action point on the first round to use *inner spark*. He then uses *psychic fists* when he can catch the greatest number enemies in one shot or *reorder chaos* to better arrange the battlefield. Taikus enters the extradimensional space when bloodiedand uses the portal to warn the Separatists in Tu'narath.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Everburning torches set on the walls fill the entire warehouse with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet high.

Crates: Boxes and crates are arranged in four rows, each 10 feet tall. An adjacent character can make a DC 22 Strength check to knock the stack over. The toppled stack fills all squares in a line up to the next stack. Creatures in the path are entitled to a saving throw to shift into an adjacent square. A failed saving throw results in the character taking 4d6 damage and being knocked prone and restrained (save ends both). Until cleared, the toppled stack counts as difficult terrain.

Extradimensional Space: The portal opens onto a small room with a permanent portal contained by a hermetic circle in the corner. The portal is opaque. Characters entering it appear in Tu'narath (page 38).

Kill Squad

Encounter Level 19 (13,600 XP)

Setup

1 githyanki blackweaver (B)
1 githyanki dread knight (K)
4 Tiamat-sworn reavers (T)

Moving through the portal alerts servants loyal to Zetch'r'r, and the emperor dispatches a kill squad to deal with the intruders. This encounter can occur in the alley where the PCs first appear or later if the PCs move quickly.

When the kill squad appears, read:

You have company. Rounding a corner, flanked by two hulking dragonborn, is a slim githyanki warrior encased in baroque armor and wielding a silver greatsword. Behind you, a hideous githyanki mage missing its lower body hovers above the ground, black lightning crackling from its withered hands. Two more dragonborn stand to the undead mage's sides.

Githyanki Blackweaver (B) **Level 20 Artillery**
Medium natural humanoid (undead) XP 2,800

Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +14; darkvision
HP 146; **Bloodied** 73
AC 32; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 34
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed fly 4 (hover)

⊕ **Corrosive Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Necrotic**
+25 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 lightning and necrotic damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

↗ **Black Lightning** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Necrotic**
Ranged 10; +25 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 lightning damage, and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends).

↜ **Consuming Shadows** (immediate reaction, when an enemy enters a space adjacent to the blackweaver; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic, Teleportation**
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +23 vs. Fortitude; 1d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is blinded (save ends). *Effect:* The blackweaver teleports 5 squares.

Lich-Queen's Legacy
The githyanki blackweaver's melee and ranged attacks deal 2d6 extra necrotic damage to targets suffering ongoing necrotic damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana +19, History +21
Str 15 (+12) **Dex** 23 (+16) **Wis** 19 (+14)
Con 20 (+15) **Int** 18 (+14) **Cha** 24 (+17)
Equipment robes

Githyanki Dread Knight (K) **Level 20 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 2,800

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +12
Final Authority aura 1; enemies in the aura take a –2 penalty to attack rolls on attacks that do not include the githyanki dread knight.
HP 190; **Bloodied** 95
AC 35; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 31
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5

⊕ **Silver Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+27 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage plus 1d6 psychic damage, and the target is marked until the end of the dread knight's next turn.

↯ **Severing Strike** (immediate interrupt, when an enemy the dread knight has marked shifts or makes an attack that does not include the dread knight; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+27 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage plus 3d6 psychic damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).

↗ **Telekinetic Leap** (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the dread knight or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

↜ **Forceful Lure** (standard; encounter)
Close burst 3; targets enemies; +23 vs. Fortitude; the target is pulled 2 squares, and the dread knight makes a melee basic attack against the target.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills History +20, Insight +17
Str 25 (+17) **Dex** 22 (+16) **Wis** 14 (+12)
Con 22 (+16) **Int** 17 (+13) **Cha** 19 (+14)
Equipment plate armor, silver greatsword

4 Tiamat-Sworn Reavers (T) **Level 18 Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, dragonborn XP 2,000 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +12
HP 176; **Bloodied** 88; see also *dragonborn fury* and *springing assault*
Regeneration 10 (only while bloodied).
AC 33; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 29
Speed 5; see also *springing assault*

⊕ **Triple-headed Flail** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+23 vs. AC (+24 while bloodied); 1d10 + 5 damage.

↯ **Rending Strike** (standard; requires triple-headed flail; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
The Tiamat-sworn reaver attacks up to three targets with its triple-headed flail. If it hits one target, it can push the next target 1 square on a hit, and if it hits two targets, the third takes ongoing 5 damage on a hit (save ends).

Dragonborn Fury (while bloodied)
The reaver gains a +1 racial bonus to attack rolls.

Skirmish +2d6
If, on its turn, the Tiamat-sworn reaver ends its move at least 3 squares away from where it began its turn, its melee attacks deal 2d6 extra damage until the start of its next turn.

Springing Assault (free, when the reaver hits with a melee attack during its turn; recharges when first bloodied)
The reaver shifts 3 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills History +12, Intimidate +13
Str 21 (+14) **Dex** 14 (+11) **Wis** 17 (+12)
Con 24 (+16) **Int** 13 (+10) **Cha** 14 (+11)
Equipment scale armor, heavy shield, triple-headed flail

Tactics

The githyanki dread knight leads the attack, springing into action using *telekinetic leap* to land in the party's midst. There, he slashes about him using his silver greatsword, focusing his attacks on soft enemies. If an enemy he marks tries to slip away, he delivers a punishing *severing strike*. If only one character is near him, he resorts to *forceful lure* to yank them back.

The blackweaver avoids melee combat, blasting characters with *black lightning* and targeting them again to benefit from *Lich-Queen's legacy*. If cornered, the blackweaver uses *consuming shadows* to make a getaway.

The Tiamat-sworn weavers have no particular loyalty to the emperor or the githyanki, and they fight only as long as they have the upper hand. Each reaver targets a different enemy, using *rending strike* to destroy their enemies. Once they make their attack, they shift and charge, even if it means taking an opportunity attack. These skirmishers maneuver as best as they can in the tight confines, but if they find it too restrictive, they retreat to the street beyond to conclude the battle.

Taking Prisoners

If the characters take any prisoners, they might learn useful information. The blackweaver and the dread knight prove unhelpful and volunteer nothing, but the dragonborn can be convinced to talk with a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failure) involving DC 22 checks with the Bluff, Diplomacy, and Intimidate skills. A victory reveals that the emperor dispatched them. The prisoner knows that Tiamat watches the emperor closely, and many suspect she might remove him altogether if it wasn't for the *scepter of Ephelomon*. Zetch'r'r, evidently, fears that the adventurers might connect with the rebels and form an alliance against him.

If the characters have no failures from the skill challenge, the prisoner also reveals that the emperor has many more kill squads out in the city, hunting for Separatist leaders. They have had some success and have even captured their leader, "some waif who who has taken Vlaakith's name. She's pretty important since the emperor didn't just kill her outright. In fact, he spirited her away to one of the floating fortresses."

Features of the Area

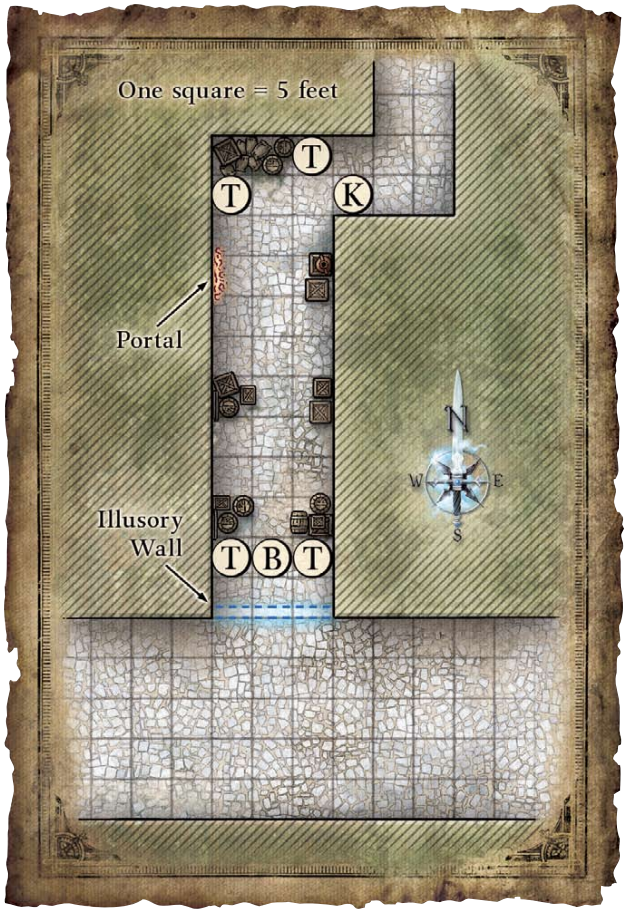
Illumination: Shadows cast by the buildings reduce the lighting in the alley to dim.

Permanent Portal: The PCs emerge into the alley through this portal. The PCs can move through the portal freely provided it remains open, which is only likely if the characters used Taikus's portal, Refer back to the map on page 63 in case the adventurers retreat here.

Rubbish: Boxes, crates, and general filth clutter the alley. Squares containing rubbish count as difficult terrain.

Illusory Wall: Spanning the alley's mouth is an illusory wall. Characters can see through it out to the street beyond, but people on the street can't see through it into the alley. Thus, the wall blocks line of sight for characters on the street.

Street: The combat might spill out onto the street beyond. People clear the area quickly, not wanting to be involved in the fight.



Blue Thunder

Encounter Level 19 (13,900 XP)

Setup

7 angels of Tiamat (A)
1 bluespawn godslayer (B)

The kill squad's failure prompts Zetch'r'r to send another band to intercept the adventurers before they meet with the Separatists. They choose a walled square to make their attack.

At some point before the PCs find the Morningstar Inn, read:

The crowds thin until you are alone in a walled square. Two empty bridges crisscross overhead, and an impressive statue depicting a githyanki warrior riding a red dragon dominates the square's center. The eerie stillness is broken when a hulking humanoid, some strange cross between giant and blue dragon, enters the square. Joining it are several winged angels whose torsos give way to wispy nothingness.

Tactics

The bluespawn godslayer charges into combat, smashing a character with its greatsword. It attacks any dragonborn or devas first, targeting defenders next. On its next turn, it makes another greatsword attack followed by *awesome blow* with an action point. The godslayer tries to push its enemy onto a spike and then focus on that opponent until it dies.

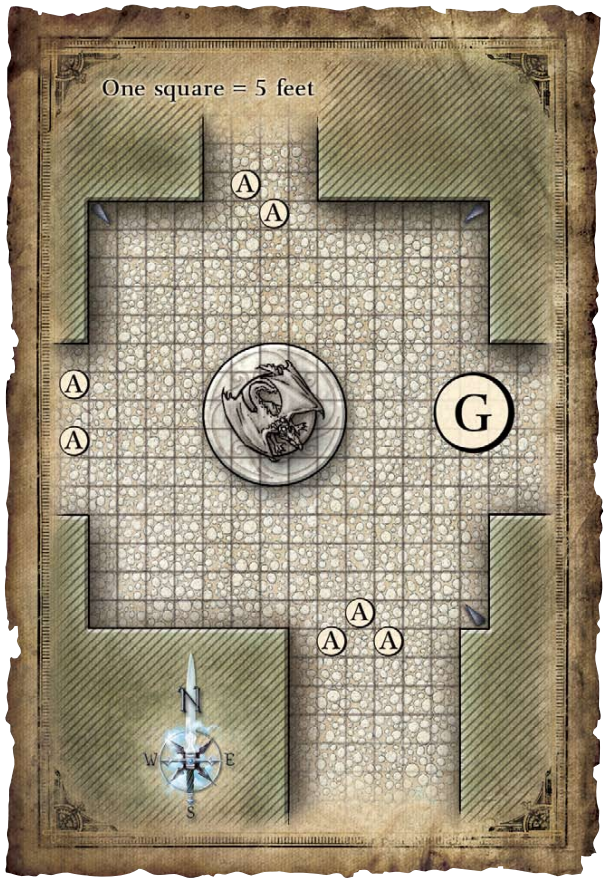
The angels work in teams of three, surrounding their opponents and slashing with their greatswords until their enemy falls. The angels fight until destroyed.

Features of the Area

Bridges: Two bridges span the square. The first is 15 feet above the squares and the second is 30 feet above.

Spike: Three corners contain bristling spikes. Any creature forcibly moved into a space containing a spike is subject to an attack.

Spike
Melee 0; +23 vs. Reflex; 10 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target takes 5 damage.



Statue: It takes a DC 22 Athletics check to enter the statue's space. A character in its space gains cover against all attacks.

7 Angels of Tiamat (A)	**Level 21 Minion**
Medium immortal humanoid (angel)	XP 800 each
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +12
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion	
AC 35; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 30	
Immune fear; **Resist** 10 fire, 10 radiant	
Speed 6, fly 9 (hover)	
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Weapon**	
+26 vs. AC; 18 fire damage.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Supernal
Str 26 (+18)	**Dex** 18 (+14) **Wis** 14 (+12)
Con 18 (+14)	**Int** 12 (+11) **Cha** 16 (+13)
Equipment chainmail, greatsword	

Bluespawn Godslayer	**Level 22 Elite Brute**
Huge natural humanoid (reptile)	XP 8,300
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +17; low-light vision
HP 510; **Bloodied** 255	
AC 36; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 33	
Resist 30 lightning, 30 thunder	
Saving Throws +2	
Speed 8	
Action Points 1	
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Weapon**	
Reach 3; +26 vs. AC; 4d6 + 9 damage plus 2d8 lightning damage; see also *slayer.*	
⸸ **Awesome Blow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Weapon**	
The godslayer makes a greatsword attack. If the attack hits, it makes a secondary attack against the same target. *Secondary Attack:* +26 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 3 squares and knocked prone.	
⸸ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**	
Reach 2; +24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage plus 2d8 lightning damage; see also *slayer.*	
Slayer	
The bluespawn godslayer deals +10 damage against dragons, dragonborn, and immortals.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Draconic
Str 28 (+20)	**Dex** 19 (+15) **Wis** 22 (+17)
Con 25 (+18)	**Int** 10 (+11) **Cha** 16 (+14)
Equipment heavy shield, greatsword	

Assaulting the Fortress

Encounter Level 20 (15,300 XP)

Setup

7 ballista platforms
26 githwarriors (G)
2 githyanki dragonknights riding pact dragon steeds (P)
1 githyanki terrth (T)

As the adventurers near the Fortress of Three Sorrows, the githyanki within mobilize to meet the threat.

Five githwarriors accompany the githyanki terrth (fortress commander), and three githwarriors operate each of the seven ballista platforms.

When the PCs see the fortress, read:

The fortress hovers on the astral horizon, a statue's decapitated head tilted on its side with a squat tower rising up from where its ear should be. Silver chains tether three smaller towers, each floating on tiny islands. Two red dragons with riders emerge from its maw.

Tactics

The first time the githyanki terrth hits an enemy with his silver longsword, he uses *instructive slash*. On subsequent turns, he follows up his longsword attacks with *slaughter the weak*. Meanwhile, the pact dragons and their riders attack any lone adventurers, or if there aren't any, their vehicle.

7 Ballista Platforms (B) **Level 19 Blaster**
Hazard XP 2,400

A massive crossbow manned by three crewmen, these platforms hurl spear-size bolts at foes.

Hazard: Seven ballista platforms arranged around the battlefield fire at enemies.

Perception
No check is necessary to notice the ballista platforms.

Trigger
When the PCs move into line of sight to a platform, a platform's crew rolls initiative and attack on their turn. A ballista requires a standard action to reload.

Initiative
A ballista platform acts on the initiative of its crew.

Attack
Standard Action **Ranged** 30
Target: One creature
Attack: +24 vs. Reflex
Hit: 4d8 + 7 damage.

Countermeasure
✦ A character can attack a crewmember (a githwarrior). If the PCs kill two crewmembers, that ballista can fire only every other round. If the PCs kill all three crewmembers, that platform is effectively disabled, although they could fire the ballista themselves.
✦ A character can attack the ballista (AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5; hp 60). Destroying the ballista disables the platform.

26 Githwarriors (G) **Level 16 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 350 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 30; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2 against charm
Speed 6; see also *telekinetic stride*

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+21 vs. AC; 12 damage.

Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +21 vs. AC; 12 damage.

Telekinetic Jump (move; encounter)
The githwarrior flies 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 25 (+15) **Dex** 20 (+13) **Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 15 (+10) **Int** 12 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+10)
Equipment scale mail, greatsword, crossbow with 10 bolts

2 Githyanki Dragonknights (P) **Level 17 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 1,600 each

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 165; **Bloodied** 82
AC 33; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 28
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5

⊕ **Silver Bastard Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage plus 1d6 psychic damage, plus 3d6 extra psychic damage against an immobilized target.

⊕ **Lance** (standard; must be mounted; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +24 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage (2d8 + 9 damage when charging).

Impaling Charge (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires lance and mount; the githyanki dragonknight makes a charge attack; reach 2; +25 vs. AC; 3d8 + 7 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). *Effect:* The githyanki dragonknight cannot make lance attacks until the end of the encounter.

Telekinetic Fist (standard; recharge ⚅)
Ranged 5; Medium or small target; +22 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 7 damage, and the target slides 2 squares and is immobilized (save ends).

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki dragonknight or an ally within range can fly 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +11, Insight +16
Str 25 (+15) **Dex** 21 (+13) **Wis** 17 (+11)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+12)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, lance, silver bastard sword

Features of the Area

Driftmetal Chains: Characters can attack the chains (AC 15, Fortitude 12, Reflex 4; hp 200). Destroying a chain sends the satellite tower adrift. The tower moves 4 squares each round, crashing into Tu'narath after 10 rounds.

Main Tower: The main tower has a crenellated wall providing cover to creatures standing behind it. A trap door on the center of the roof leads down to room 1.

2 Pact Dragons (P) **Level 13 Skirmisher**
Large immortal magical beast (dragon, mount) XP 800 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 134; **Bloodied** 67; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25
Resist 10 fire, 10 psychic
Speed 7, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 14

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage; see also *skirmish.*

Aggressive Charger (while mounted by a friendly rider of 13th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount**
When charging, the pact dragon makes a bite attack in addition to the rider's charge attack.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 5; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 12 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The dragon's *breath weapon* recharges and the dragon uses it immediately.

Astral Jaunt (minor; recharge ⁞⁞) ✦ **Mount, Teleportation**
The pact dragon and its rider disappear into the Astral Sea, teleporting 10 squares.

Pledged Rider (while mounted by a friendly rider of 13th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount**
Any damage dealt to the pact dragon can be redirected to the rider, and vice versa.

Skirmish +2d6
If, on its turn, the pact dragon ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals 2d6 extra damage on all melee attacks it makes until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, Draconic, telepathy 20
Skills Endurance +17, Insight +15
Str 24 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+10)
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 15 (+8) **Cha** 16 (+9)

Githyanki Terrth (S) **Level 16 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 1,400

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +15
Unwavering Discipline aura 3; any ally within the aura gains a +2 bonus to defenses.
HP 154; **Bloodied** 77
AC 31; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 27
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5

⊕ **Silver Longsword** (free, after the githyanki terrth hits an enemy with a *silver longsword* attack; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 4 damage, and the target is dazed until the end of the githyanki terrth's next turn.

Slaughter the Weak (standard; at-will)
One ally adjacent to the githyanki terrth makes a melee basic attack against the same enemy. If the enemy is dazed or stunned, the attack deals 2d8 extra psychic damage.

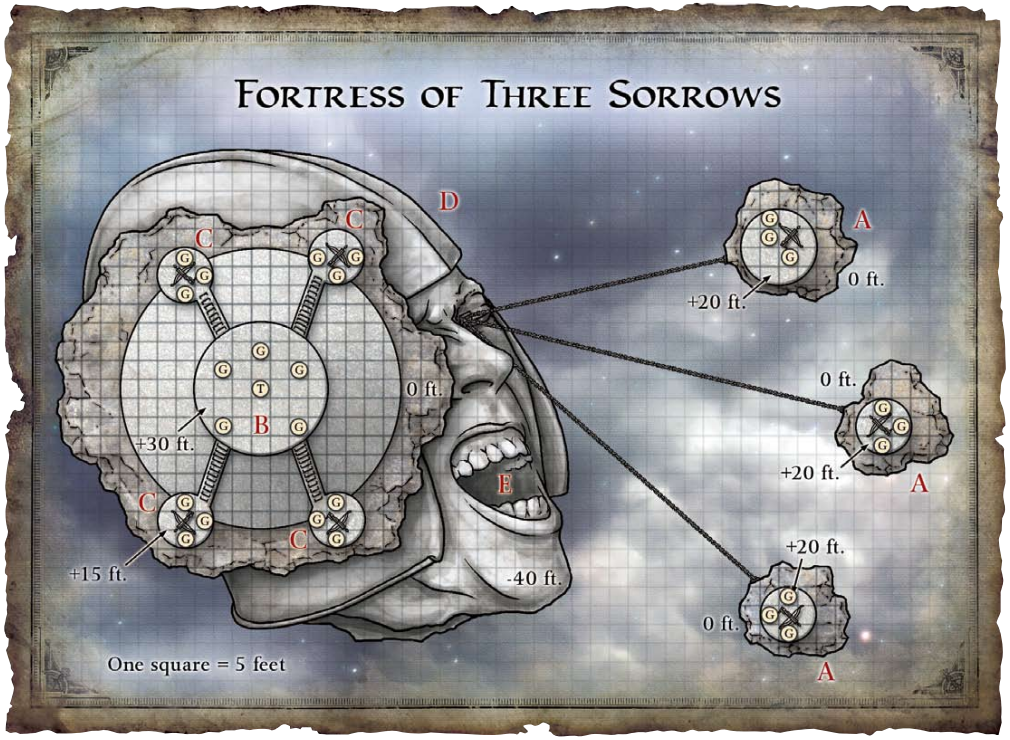
Instructive Slash (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Targets a dazed creature; +23 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage plus 2d8 psychic damage.

Heavy Crossbow (standard; recharges when the githyanki spends a minor action to reload the weapon) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +21 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage.

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 5; targets the githyanki terrth or one ally; the target can fly up to 5 squares.

Telekinetic Command (move; encounter)
Close burst 5; one ally in the burst slides up to 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +12, Insight +15
Str 24 (+15) **Dex** 19 (+12) **Wis** 14 (+10)
Con 18 (+12) **Int** 14 (+10) **Cha** 16 (+11)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, silver longsword, heavy crossbow, 20 bolt



DESPERATE DEFENDERS

Encounter Level 20 (14,350 XP)

Setup

2 gish'sarath (S)
8 githwarriors (G)
1 githyanki kith'rak (K)
1 redspawn immolator (R)

While the battle rages outside, the githyanki scramble to defend the fortress to ensure Vlaakith doesn't escape. The kith'rak (captain) and support troops are the first line of defense inside the fortress, with reinforcements coming on the round following.

When the PCs can see into the central room, read:

A shuddering red-scaled beast crowned with fire growls at you while a githyanki dressed in black-enameled plate and wielding a fullblade shouts orders to attack. Two githyanki underlings in scale armor ready themselves for battle.

The ladder drops from the roof trapdoor and ends at a 30-foot diameter chamber with an iron door set in the wall to either side. A spiral staircase burrows deeper into the tower.

2 Gish'sarath (S) **Level 16 Elite Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 2,800 each

Initiative +12 **Senses** Perception +15
HP 306; **Bloodied** 153
AC 30; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 29
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against charm effects)
Speed 5; see also *astral stride*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Silver Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+21 vs. AC; 1d8 + 6 plus 1d8 psychic damage.

Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
The gish'sarath makes two silver longsword attacks.

Force Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Ranged 10; +19 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 4 force damage.

Storm of Stars (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The gish'sarath makes four attacks, no more than two of these against a single target; ranged 5; +21 vs. AC; 2d8 + 5 fire damage.

Astral Stride (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The gish'sarath teleports 6 squares and gains the insubstantial and phasing qualities until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills Arcana +17, History +14, Insight +15
Str 16 (+11) **Dex** 14 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+10)
Con 17 (+11) **Int** 19 (+12) **Cha** 17 (+11)
Equipment chainmail, silver longsword

8 Githwarriors (G) **Level 16 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 350 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 30; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2 against charm
Speed 6; see also *telekinetic stride*

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+21 vs. AC; 12 damage.

Crossbow (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +21 vs. AC; 12 damage.

Telekinetic Jump (move; encounter)
The githwarrior flies 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 25 (+15) **Dex** 20 (+13) **Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 15 (+10) **Int** 12 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+10)
Equipment scale mail, greatsword, crossbow with 10 bolts

Githyanki Kith'rak (K) **Level 20 Soldier (Leader)**
Medium natural humanoid XP 2,800

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +18
HP 190; **Bloodied** 95
AC 36; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 31
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5

⊕ **Silver Fullblade** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+27 vs. AC; 1d12 + 6 damage plus 1d8 psychic (crit 2d12 + 18 + 8 psychic), and the next time the target takes damage before the start of the kith'rak's next turn, it takes 1d8 extra psychic damage.

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki kith'rak or an ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

Telekinetic Snare (standard; encounter)
Ranged 5; +25 vs. Fortitude; the target slides 2 squares and is immobilized (save ends).

Devastating Arc (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Close burst 1; the githyanki kith'rak makes a *silver fullblade* attack against each enemy in the burst.

Emperor's Voice (standard; encounter) ✦ **Healing**
Close burst 5; each ally in burst regains 20 hit points.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills History +14, Insight +18
Str 26 (+18) **Dex** 23 (+16) **Wis** 16 (+13)
Con 22 (+16) **Int** 15 (+12) **Cha** 18 (+14)
Equipment plate armor, silver fullblade, keys to all the cells on this level and the level below

Redspawn Immolator (R)		**Level 20 Brute**
Large natural beast (reptile)		XP 2,800
Initiative +16	**Senses** Perception +11; darkvision	
Inner Flame (Fire) aura 3; any ally within the aura gains resist 10 fire. While the immolator is bloodied, each enemy that ends its turn in the aura takes 10 fire damage.		
HP 234; **Bloodied** 117; see also *inner flame* and *redspawn frenzy*		
AC 32; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 29		
Resist 20 fire		
Speed 6		
⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**		
Reach 2; +23 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).		
⸸ **Claws** (standard; at-will)		
Reach 2; +23 vs. AC; 2d10 + 6 damage.		
✧ **Fiery Expulsion** (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire**		
Close blast 3; +21 vs. Reflex; 1d12 + 7 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).		
Redspawn Frenzy (while at 58 or fewer hit points)		
The redspawn immolator's melee attacks deal 2d6 extra damage, and the immolator treats allies as enemies for the purposes of opportunity attacks and makes all opportunity attacks provoked from it.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Draconic	
Str 27 (+18)	**Dex** 22 (+16)	**Wis** 12 (+11)
Con 24 (+17)	**Int** 8 (+9)	**Cha** 17 (+13)

Tactics

The githyanki's tactics depend on whether the adventurers descend into the central room. If they linger at the top, the githwarriors use their crossbows and the gish'sarath uses *force bolt*. The redspawn immolator climbs the ladder, sped up by the kith'rak, who uses *telekinetic leap* to place the monster near the top.

The githyanki focus fire on the first character to come down the ladder, and then engage in melee combat when more characters join their companion. The dragonspawn makes a charge attack against the closest enemy and then uses its claws, fighting until destroyed.

The kith'rak uses *telekinetic snare* to move an enemy closer to the redspawn immolator and uses his silver fullblade to dispatch the character. The kith'rak reserves *devastating arc* for when it faces three or more enemies at once, and uses *emperor's voice* when the dragonspawn's *redspawn fury* activates.

The gish'sarath supports the githwarriors using *force bolt* and *storm of stars*, only reverting to melee attacks when he exhausts his ranged attacks.

Reinforcements in the hall outside the main chamber arrive at the start of the second round, while those in the barracks join the fight at the start of the fourth round.

Features of the Area

Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet high.

Iron Ladder: The ladder descends from the hatch to the bottom of the room. Climbing the ladder requires a DC 0 Athletics check.

Doors: Iron bars can be dropped over the doors to prevent reinforcements from arriving (DC 27 Strength check). The bars themselves count as unattended objects weighing less than 20 pounds.

Cells: Prison cells make up a third of this floor. Each door is locked (DC 22 Thievery or DC 27 Strength to open). The cells contain a mix of political prisoners or nothing (as you decide). None of these prisoners are useful for this foray (treat as minions; all defenses 22), but they might prove helpful later.

Barracks: Opposite the cells are the barracks. This big room features many bunk beds, a few tables surrounded by chairs, and a kitchen.

Treasure: Characters searching the barracks find treasure parcel 8 amid mundane clothing and personal effects.

JAIL BREAK

Encounter Level 21 (16,000 XP)

SETUP

1 angel of Tiamat's Vengeance (A)
1 aspect of Dispater (D)
2 barbed devil veterans (B)

The aspect of Dispater interrogates the prisoner while his attendants watch.

When the PCs can see Vlaakith, read:

Suspended within a column of fire is a young githyanki woman. Her body doesn't move, but her eyes flick toward you. To the side, and turning your direction, is a towering angel whose astral essence crackles with lightning, flares with flames, and drips poison. Opposite the guardian stands a slim, horned humanoid dressed in scarlet robes and gripping a gnarled staff in his hands. Just inside the doorway, two menacing humanoids covered in gleaming barbs fix you with fiery eyes.

Aspect of Dispater (D) **Level 20 Elite Controller (Leader)**
Medium immortal humanoid (devil) XP 5,600

Initiative +14 **Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 382; **Bloodied** 191
AC 37; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 35, **Will** 34
Resist 20 fire
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6, teleport 10
Action Points 1

⊕ **Smiting Rod** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+25 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 damage, and the target is pushed 2 squares and dazed until the end of the aspect of Dispater's next turn.

↟ **Lesser Blasphemous Reply** (immediate reaction, when hit by a melee attack; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Thunder**
Targets the attacker; +24 vs. Will; 3d8 + 7 thunder damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

↝ **Lesser Inveigle** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Charm, Psychic**
Ranged 10; +24 vs. Will; 2d6 + 7 psychic damage, and the target slides 2 squares and is dominated until the end of the aspect of Dispater's next turn.

A Lesser Gate of Dis (minor; recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞) ✦ **Conjuration, Fire**
Area wall 5 within 20 squares. The aspect of Dispater conjures a lattice of scalding iron that lasts until the start of his next turn. The wall blocks movement and line of effect, but it does not block line of sight. Creatures that end their turn adjacent to the wall or are pulled, pushed, or slid adjacent to the wall take 10 fire damage. The wall is 4 squares high and cannot be destroyed.

Lesser Diabolic Awe (free 1/round, when an enemy within 5 squares becomes bloodied or takes a critical hit; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Healing**
The enemy is pushed 3 squares away from the aspect of Dispater and is dazed until the end of the aspect's next turn. Creatures with the devil keyword within 5 squares of the aspect of Dispater regain 10 hit points.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Arcana +23, Bluff +22, History +23, Insight +20, Religion +23
Str 18 (+14) **Dex** 19 (+14) **Wis** 20 (+15)
Con 23 (+16) **Int** 26 (+18) **Cha** 25 (+17)
Equipment scarlet robe, smiting rod

Angel of Tiamat's Vengeance (A) **Level 19 Elite Brute**
Large immortal humanoid (angel) XP 4,800

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 446; **Bloodied** 223
AC 34; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 33; see also *chromatic cloak*
Immune disease, fear; **Resist** 15 radiant, 15 variable (3/encounter, acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison only; see "Resist," *Monster Manual*, page 282); see also *coldfire pillar*
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 12 (hover); see also *sign of vengeance*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison, Weapon**
Reach 2; +25 vs. AC; 1d10 + 9 damage plus 1d8 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage plus 1d8 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage.

↟ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The angel of vengeance makes two longsword attacks.

↝ **Sign of Vengeance** (minor; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged sight; the angel of vengeance places an invisible sign upon the target. Until the end of the encounter, as a move action, the angel can teleport adjacent to the target.

✧ **Chromatic Pillar** (when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire Lightning, Poison, Polymorph**
The angel transforms into a 30-foot-high pillar of draconic energies. Close burst 2; +23 vs. Reflex; 1d8 + 9 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage plus 1d8 + 9 acid, cold, fire, lightning, or poison damage. The angel of Tiamat's vengeance is immune to all damage until the start of its next turn.

Chromatic Cloak (until bloodied) ✦ **Acid, Cold, Fire, Lightning, Poison**
Attacks against the angel of vengeance take a –2 penalty until the angel is bloodied. While *cloak of vengeance* is in effect, a creature that makes a successful melee attack against the angel takes 1d8 acid or cold damage and 1d8 fire, lightning, or poison damage.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Insight +21, Intimidate +22
Str 27 (+17) **Dex** 18 (+13) **Wis** 25 (+16)
Con 23 (+15) **Int** 19 (+13) **Cha** 26 (+17)
Equipment plate armor, 2 longswords

2 Barbed Devil Veterans (B)	Level 20 Soldier
Large immortal humanoid (devil)	XP 2,800 each

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Grasping Barbs aura 1; an enemy that enters or leaves the aura takes 5 damage and is marked until the end of its next turn.
HP 191; **Bloodied** 95
AC 37; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 31
Resist 20 fire
Speed 7, teleport 7

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
+27 vs. AC; 1d8 + 8 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

⊕ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The barbed devil veteran makes two claw attacks. If both attacks hit the same target, the barbed devil veteran tries to impale the target on its barbs as a secondary attack. *Secondary Attack:* +24 vs. Reflex; 5 damage.

Hurl Flame (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 5; +22 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 8 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 fire damage and is dazed (save ends both).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Athletics +23, Intimidate +21

Str 27 (+18)	**Dex** 22 (+16)	**Wis** 16 (+13)
Con 23 (+16)	**Int** 13 (+11)	**Cha** 22 (+16)

Tactics

The angel uses *sign of vengeance* and then closes on the lead enemy, using *double attack* each round until bloodied, at which point it transforms into a *chromatic pillar*.

The aspect uses *lesser inveigle* to draw a character into the room and then spends an action point to raise his *lesser gate of Dis*. The aspect focuses on the unlucky character with its *smiting rod*, while waiting for his powers to recharge.

The barbed devils back away from the entrance to pull the adventurers into the room. They use *hurl flame* on the first round, and then use *double attack* against those PCs who enter.

Dispater tries to flee if reduced to 95 or fewer hit points, surrendering only if he's the last one in the room. When the PCs first bloody the aspect, it shouts, "Release her and you will bring about the doom of all things!"

Features of the Area

Doors: All doors here are locked. The kith'rak in "Desperate Defenders" (page 70) has the keys. Otherwise, opening a locked door requires a DC 25 Strength or Thievery check.

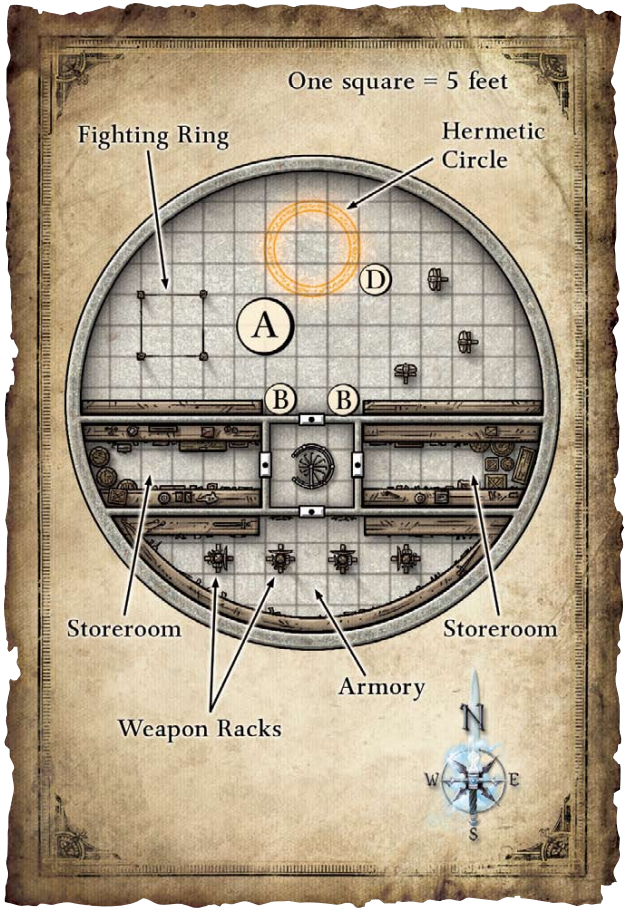
Treasure: A character searching the armory who succeeds on a DC 22 Perception check locates treasure parcels 2 and 3. A character searching the storerooms who succeeds on a DC 22 Perception check discovers treasure parcel 6 spread across both rooms.

Fighting Ring: The fighting ring a roped-off platform standing two feet high. Getting into the fighting ring costs an extra square of movement unless a DC 14 Acrobatics check is made.

Training Dummies: Three dummies equipped with sharp blades stand at the ready to engage would-be trainees. The dummy makes an attack against any creature that enters a square adjacent to it unless the triggering creature succeeds on a DC 14 Acrobatics check.

⊕ **Training Dummy Slash**
Melee 1; +26 vs. AC; 10 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

Hermetic Circle: The circle creates a dangerous field that extends from floor to ceiling. Creatures inside the field are immune to all damage, and the field blocks line of effect. An adjacent character can dismantle the field by engaging in a complexity 1 skill challenge (4 successes before 3 failures) involving Arcana and Thievery checks against DC 22. A failed check or touching the field triggers an attack.



Energy Field Pulse ✦ **Fire**
Close burst 1; all creatures in burst; +25 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 fire damage, and the target takes ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

INTO THE MAW

Encounter Level 18 (10,400 XP)

SETUP

2 githyanki dragonknights (D)
2 pack dragons (P)
16 githwarriors (G)

The adventurers automatically gain surprise if they catch the githyanki while still in the hangar.

When the PCs first approach this area, read:

The stairs end in a large hangar. Two wide alcoves hold red dragons, and attending them are githyanki warriors in plate armor. More githyanki work on the astral skiffs or sort through supplies.

2 Githyanki Dragonknights (P) **Level 17 Soldier**
Medium natural humanoid XP 1,600 each

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 165; **Bloodied** 82
AC 33; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 26, **Will** 28
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects
Speed 5

⊕ **Silver Bastard Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 damage plus 1d6 psychic damage, plus 3d6 extra psychic damage against an immobilized target.

⊕ **Lance** (standard; must be mounted; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Reach 2; +24 vs. AC; 1d8 + 9 damage (2d8 + 9 damage when charging).

Impaling Charge (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**
Requires lance and mount; the githyanki dragonknight makes a charge attack; reach 2; +25 vs. AC; 3d8 + 7 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends). *Effect:* The githyanki dragonknight cannot make lance attacks until the end of the encounter.

Telekinetic Fist (standard; recharge ⚅)
Ranged 5; Medium or small target; +22 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 7 damage, and the target slides 2 squares and is immobilized (save ends).

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the githyanki dragonknight or an ally within range can fly 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills History +11, Insight +16
Str 25 (+15) **Dex** 21 (+13) **Wis** 17 (+11)
Con 21 (+13) **Int** 13 (+9) **Cha** 18 (+12)
Equipment plate armor, heavy shield, lance, silver bastard sword

2 Pact Dragons (P) **Level 13 Skirmisher**
Large immortal magical beast (dragon, mount) XP 800 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 134; **Bloodied** 67; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 27; **Fortitude** 26, **Reflex** 25, **Will** 25
Resist 10 fire, 10 psychic
Speed 7, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 14

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +18 vs. AC; 2d6 + 7 damage; see also *skirmish.*

Aggressive Charger (while mounted by a friendly rider of 13th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount**
When charging, the pact dragon makes a bite attack in addition to the rider's charge attack.

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 5; +15 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 12 fire damage, and ongoing 5 fire damage (save ends).

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The dragon's *breath weapon* recharges and the dragon uses it immediately.

Astral Jaunt (minor; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Mount, Teleportation**
The pact dragon and its rider disappear into the Astral Sea, teleporting 10 squares.

Pledged Rider (while mounted by a friendly rider of 13th level or higher; at-will) ✦ **Mount**
Any damage dealt to the pact dragon can be redirected to the rider, and vice versa.

Skirmish +2d6
If, on its turn, the pact dragon ends its move at least 4 squares away from its starting point, it deals 2d6 extra damage on all melee attacks it makes until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Deep Speech, Draconic, telepathy 20
Skills Endurance +17, Insight +15
Str 24 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+11) **Wis** 18 (+10)
Con 22 (+12) **Int** 15 (+8) **Cha** 16 (+9)

16 Githwarriors (G)	Level 16 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki	XP 350 each
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26	
Saving Throws +2 against charm	
Speed 6; see also *telekinetic stride*	
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
+21 vs. AC; 12 damage.	
➳ **Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**	
Ranged 15/30; +21 vs. AC; 12 damage.	
Telekinetic Jump (move; encounter)	
The githwarrior flies 5 squares.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 25 (+15)	**Dex** 20 (+13) **Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 15 (+10)	**Int** 12 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+10)
Equipment scale mail, greatsword, crossbow with 10 bolts	

Tactics

When the githyanki are no longer surprised, the dragonknights mount their dragons and attack the PCs, even though they have little room to maneuver. Using Deep Speech, one dragonknight orders a crew onto an *astral interceptor* to get help. Four githwarriors converge on the vessel to take off and get help, ramming PCs if necessary.

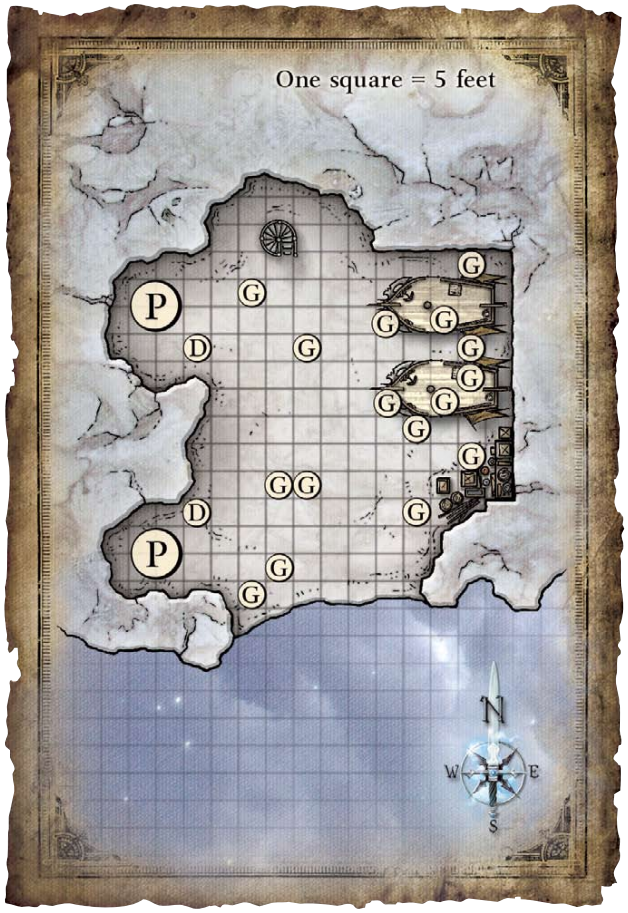
Development

The heroes must stop the fleeing *astral interceptor* before it escapes and brings reinforcements. This could be a thrilling chase over Tu'narath or a vicious battle in the Astral Sea. If the ship gets away, use creatures presented in this adventure to build a level 22 encounter. These reinforcements arrive 5 minutes after the ship escapes.

Features of the Area

***Astral Interceptor*:** Two astral vessels stand at the ready. They have enclosed hulls, so creatures inside cannot be targeted by attacks. See page 46 for statistics.

Supplies: Squares containing these items count as difficult terrain, and a creature knocked prone here takes 5 damage from the jagged bits and pointy things.



A Turning Point

Encounter Level 21 (16,000 XP)

Setup

The moment for which the adventures have long fought is at hand. Vlaakith and her lieutenants are open to discussion about withdrawing the githyanki from the war and might be convinced to give their aid in the ongoing struggle.

A Turning Point **Level 21**
Skill Challenge XP 16,000

The room hums as the gathered assembly awaits your words. In their cold faces, you see everything from blank stares, to suspicion, to open hatred. Vlaakith stands and the room quiets. "These visitors have come a long way and have endured many hardships. Let us hear their words to seek an accord between our peoples."

Although the githyanki want nothing to do with Tiamat's war, they are not allies yet. To get the githyanki to withdraw fully from the war, the characters must make a bargain all can live with.

Complexity

5 (12 successes before 3 failures).

Primary Skills

Diplomacy, History, Insight, Intimidate, Religion, Streetwise.

Other Skills

Bluff.

Victory

Vlaakith agrees to withdraw the githyanki from the war provided the characters successfully defeat Zetch'r'r. Vlaakith also grants the PCs' world a reprieve from githyanki attacks for a thousand years (though this applies only to those githyanki under Vlaakith's command; she doesn't mention this). Finally, if the characters acquire no failures in the course of the skill challenge, Vlaakith agrees to a short-term alliance between her people and those of the adventurers. Such an alliance proves beneficial to the PCs in a future Scales of War adventure.

Defeat

Vlaakith agrees to withdraw the githyanki from the war but only with the following conditions. The adventurers must kill Zetch'r'r, and they must find and destroy the remains of Vlaakith CLVII.

Special

If Mayhem is present for the negotiations, he can speak on the characters behalf, assuming the characters have performed and treated him well. At any point during the negotiation, the PCs can convert one failed check into a successful check.

If the PCs rescued Vlaakith and freed her without question, the characters gain a +2 bonus to all Diplomacy checks. This bonus increases to +4 if the PCs saved her after dealing with the Emperor.

Bluff (DC 27)

The PCs make promises or offers they cannot actually follow through on or have no intention to uphold.

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill.

Diplomacy 1 (DC 22; 2 successes)

The PCs describe their predicament, what they know of Tiamat's intent, and what will result if she is victorious.

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill. Achieving 2 successes opens up Diplomacy 2.

Diplomacy 2 (DC 22; 2 successes maximum; requires Diplomacy 1 to unlock)

The PCs explain that through their alliance with Tiamat, the githyanki have become embroiled in a divine war not of their making and they are taking a hand in the fate of the gods.

Achieving 2 successes opens up Diplomacy 3.

Diplomacy 3 (DC 27; 2 successes maximum; requires Diplomacy 2 or Streetwise to unlock)

The PCs announce that Tiamat has violated the ancient pact and thus the githyanki are no longer bound by its terms. One githyanki asks that if this is true, where is Gith?

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill. The first success here opens up Insight. The second success opens up Diplomacy 4.

Diplomacy 4 (DC 22; 4 successes maximum; requires Diplomacy 3 to unlock)

The PCs ask for an alliance.

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill. On the first success, Vlaakith says that even if they agreed, their alliance would be worthless while Zetch'r'r is still in power. This opens up Diplomacy 5. On a failed check, the characters cannot make this check again until they succeed on another check related to the skill challenge.

Diplomacy 5

The PCs volunteer to destroy Zetch'r'r and end his reign.

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill.

History (DC 14; 1 success maximum; requires Diplomacy 4 to unlock)

A character recalls the terms of the ancient pact, remembering that Gith demanded the githyanki be free to rule their own destiny.

DC 27 (1 success, 2 maximum)

Insight (DC 22; 1 success maximum; requires Diplomacy 3 to unlock)

The PCs notice Vlaakith flinches when they mention the pact has been violated.

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill. A success here also opens up Intimidate.

Intimidate (DC 27)

The PCs paint a pretty bleak picture about what is in store for the githyanki if they don't withdraw from the war, suggesting that they will be destroyed if they lose or become subservient to Tiamat if they win.

Characters can cooperate to aid a lead character using this skill.

Religion 1 (DC 22 (1 success maximum))

A character describes Tiamat's notoriety and her long history of betrayals by citing key moments where she has acted in the world. This bleak portrait calls into question the strength of the githyanki alliance with the Dark Lady.

Success opens up Religion 2.

Religion 2 (DC 22; 1 success maximum; requires Religion 1 or Streetwise to unlock)

A PC reminds the githyanki that no god has ever ruled the githyanki peoples.

Streetwise (DC 14; 2 successes maximum)

A character cites an example of how Tiamat actually controls the city, and also how Zetch'r'r serves Tiamat directly.

The first success also opens up the Religion 2 check. The second success opens up Diplomacy 3.

Failure

A defeat on this skill challenge doesn't mean the adventure is over; it results in an even greater challenge and no guarantees that the githyanki won't become a problem at some future point.

Stillness Broken

Encounter Level 19 (12,400 XP)

Setup

3 slaughter wights (S)
1 tormenting ghost (T)
2 wrath spirits (W)

The undead hunger for souls and attack when the characters draw near.

When the PCs are about halfway to the Chromatic Bastion, read:

The path travels through a damaged area, with a yawning fissure to one side and crumbling tombs and rubble to the other. Black fire gutters up in columns on either side of the road.

3 Slaughter Wights	**Level 18 Brute**
Medium natural humanoid (undead)	XP 2,000 each
Initiative +14	**Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
HP 182; **Bloodied** 91; see also *death wail*	
AC 30; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 27, **Will** 26	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant	
Speed 7	
⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Healing, Necrotic**	
+21 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 necrotic damage, the target loses a healing surge and is weakened (save ends), and the slaughter wight regains 15 hit points.	
✧ **Death Wail** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +21 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 4 necrotic damage. Undead allies in the burst can make a basic attack as a free action.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common
Str 26 (+17)	**Dex** 20 (+14) **Wis** 9 (+8)
Con 22 (+15)	**Int** 12 (+10) **Cha** 18 (+13)

Tormenting Ghost (T)	**Level 21 Controller**
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 3,200
Initiative +19	**Senses** Perception +17; darkvision
HP 152; **Bloodied** 76	
AC 32; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 32	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial	
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing	
⊕ **Spirit Touch** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+24 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 9 necrotic damage.	
✦ **Ghostly Possession** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Charm**	
Target must be a living humanoid; +24 vs. Will; the tormenting ghost enters the target's space and is removed from play, and the target is dominated (save ends). The tormenting ghost can use the power against only one creature at a time. When the target is no longer dominated, or when the tormenting ghost chooses to end its *ghostly possession* (a free action), the ghost reappears in a square adjacent to the target.	
✧ **Burst of Terror** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fear, Necrotic**	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +24 vs. Will; 1d8 + 9 necrotic damage, the target is pushed 5 squares; and the target is dazed and immobilized (save ends both).	
✧ **Ghostly Terrain** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Zone**	
Area burst 1 within 10; the area is suddenly filled with ghostly lights, wisps of necrotic mist, and the faint whispers of the dead. The zone is difficult terrain and lightly obscured. Any creature that enters or ends its turn in the zone is immobilized (save ends). The zone lasts until the end of the encounter of for 5 minutes.	
Spectral Shift (immediate reaction, when missed by a melee attack; at-will)	
The tormenting ghost shifts 3 squares.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +24	
Str 11 (+10)	**Dex** 28 (+19) **Wis** 14 (+12)
Con 20 (+15)	**Int** 12 (+11) **Cha** 25 (+17)

2 Wrath Spirits (W)		Level 17 Soldier
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)		XP 1,600 each
Initiative +11	**Senses** Perception +12; darkvision	
HP 111; **Bloodied** 55		
AC 33; **Fortitude** 27, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 30		
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial		
Speed fly 6 (hover); phasing		
ⓘ **Keening Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**		
+24 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 psychic damage, and the target is marked until the end of the wrath spirit's next turn.		
✲ **Exploding Head** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fear, Necrotic**		
The wrath spirit materializes a flame semblance of its missing head and hurls it: area burst 2 within 10; +21 vs. Fortitude; 3d10 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized and marked (save ends both). *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is marked but not immobilized.		
Burning Challenge (immediate reaction, when an enemy marked by the wrath spirit makes an attack that does not include the wrath spirit; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**		
The triggering enemy takes ongoing 10 psychic damage and is dazed (save ends both).		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common	
Str 16 (+11)	**Dex** 17 (+11)	**Wis** 18 (+12)
Con 15 (+10)	**Int** 22 (+14)	**Cha** 24 (+15)

Tactics

The slaughter wights shriek to alert their allies in the tombs, charge, and then make a fighting retreat to the pillars of necrotic flame to boost their attacks. The wrath spirits fly around behind the PCs to herd them forward, while the tormenting ghost finds a melee striker and attacks using *burst of terror.*

Features of the Area

Rubble: Squares containing rubble count as difficult terrain.

Chasms: The small chasm is about 30 feet deep (dealing 3d10 damage to those who fall in), while the larger one is about 90 feet deep (9d10 damage). Climbing out of a chasm requires DC 14 Athletics checks.

Sealed Vaults: A vault grants cover and has AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5; hp 40.

Mausoleums: A locked door (DC 27 Thievery or DC 32 Strength) bars access. Each tomb holds a stone sarcophagus and he rotting remains within it. The tormenting ghost and wrath spirits use phasing to move through the mausoleums' walls unimpeded.

Pillars of Necrotic Flame: Black fire gutters from wounds in the dead god. Necrotic attacks made from spaces adjacent to either pillar gain a +10 bonus to damage rolls. Creatures entering or starting their turns in a space containing the necrotic flame take 10 fire and necrotic damage.

Treasure: One shattered mausoleum contains parcel 1.

Evil's Backbone

Encounter Level 21 (18,000 XP)

Setup

Spine of Vlaakith (V)
2 sword wraith attendants (S)

When Zetch'r'r came to power, the githyanki believed the Lich-Queen was well and truly dead. However, the new emperor discovered that a piece of her remained: her spine. Through dread magic, Zetch'r'r bound her spirit to the spine and extracted oaths of service from it, transforming the dead Lich-Queen into a form of demilich. As long as Zetch'r'r lives, Vlaakith would serve.

When the PCs enter the room, read:

A blackened spine hovers before an iron door across the room. Pale blue light from the flickering torches glint off six bright amethysts set into each bone ring. The spine casts a queer shadow on the white tile floor, suggesting that of a tall, thin female humanoid.

Perception Check
DC 31 *Shadows in the room's corners seem to move independent of the light source, coalescing into vague humanoid figures.*

Spine of Vlaakith (V) **Level 20 Solo Artillery**
Tiny natural animate (undead) XP 14,000
Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision
Intruding Terror (Fear) aura 2; enemies within the aura take a –2 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 600; **Bloodied** 300; see also *consume soul* and *indestructible*
Regeneration 20 (if the spine of Vlaakith takes radiant damage, regeneration doesn't function until the end of its next turn)
AC 32; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 33
Immune disease, poison, sleep; **Resist** 10 necrotic, 10 psychic
Saving Throws +5
Speed fly 12 (hover)
Action Points 2

Shadow Ray (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +27 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 necrotic damage.

Immobilizing Ray (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +25 vs. Fortitude; 1d6 + 8 necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Drain Soul (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; does not provoke opportunity attacks; +25 vs. Fortitude; the target is dazed and restrained (save ends both). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is instead stunned and restrained (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target dies, and its soul is trapped in one of the spine's *soul gems* until the spine is destroyed; see also *consume soul* and "Fate of Drained Souls" sidebar.

Wither (minor; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +25 vs. Fortitude; the target takes ongoing 10 necrotic damage (save ends).

Twin Rays (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
The spine of Vlaakith makes a *shadow ray* attack and a *immobilizing ray* attack.

Soul Shriveling Pulse (immediate reaction, when a creature fails a saving throw against *drain soul*; at-will) ✦ **Fear, Necrotic**
Close burst 5; +25 vs. Fortitude; 3d6 + 5 necrotic damage, and the target takes a –2 penalty to saving throws (save ends).

Consume Soul (minor; expends a trapped soul; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Healing**
The spine of Vlaakith regains 200 hit points.

Soul Gems
The spine of Vlaakith's six *soul gems* can each hold the soul of one if its victims. At the beginning of an encounter, the *soul gems* contain two souls. Crushing a gem after the spine is defeated releases the soul back to the Shadowfell.

Indestructible
When the spine of Vlaakith is reduced to 0 hit points or fewer, its spine (but not the *soul gems*) crumbles into dust, but it is not destroyed. It reappears 1d10 days later within 1 square of its phylactery (in room 15), unless the phylactery is also found and destroyed.

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common, Supernal
Skills Arcana +17, Insight +18, Intimidate +23, Religion +18
Str 16 (+13) **Dex** 16 (+13) **Wis** 17 (+13)
Con 24 (+17) **Int** 15 (+12) **Cha** 27 (+18)

2 Sword Wraith Attendants (S)	Level 18 Lurker
Medium shadow humanoid (undead)	XP 2,000 each
Initiative +20	**Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 95; **Bloodied** 47; see also *death strike*	
Regeneration 10	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 33	
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic, insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant (if the sword wraith attendant takes radiant damage, its regeneration does not function until the end of the its next turn)	
Speed fly 8 (hover); phasing; see also *shadow glide*	
⊕ **Shadow Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**	
+21 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is weakened (save ends).	
⸸ **Death Strike** (when reduced to 0 hit points) ✦ **Necrotic**	
The sword wraith shifts 4 squares and makes a melee basic attack, dealing 2d8 extra necrotic damage on a hit.	
Combat Advantage ✦ **Necrotic**	
The sword wraith attendant deals 2d6 extra necrotic damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.	
Shadow Glide (move; encounter)	
The sword wraith attendant shifts 6 squares.	
Spawn Wraith	
Any humanoid killed by a sword wraith rises as a free-willed sword wraith at the start of its creator's next turn, appearing in the space where it died (or in the nearest unoccupied space). Raising the slain creature (using the Raise Dead ritual) does not destroy the spawned wraith.	
Alignment Chaotic evil	**Languages** Common
Skills Stealth +21	
Str 14 (+11)	**Dex** 24 (+16)	**Wis** 12 (+10)
Con 18 (+13)	**Int** 11 (+9)	**Cha** 24 (+16)

Tactics

Vlaakith would gladly let the PCs pass to destroy the emperor, but Zetch'r'r's magic impels her to attack. She waits for the characters to attack first or to move past the first pair of columns, at which point she attacks using *twin rays*. She then uses her *drain soul* attack by spending action point if the target is within 5 squares. She uses this tactics against any opponent who draws too close, using her *immobilizing ray* to keep fleeing enemies in place.

The sword wraith attendants harry PCs who don't close on the spine, using phasing to move through the floor and come up behind their opponents. They work together to ensure they get flanking. If they find themselves close to a dazed enemy, they don't pass up the chance to strike the afflicted enemy with their *shadow swords* in the hopes of spawning a new sword wraith.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Two everburning torches in sconces to either side of the door to room 3 fill the room with bright light.

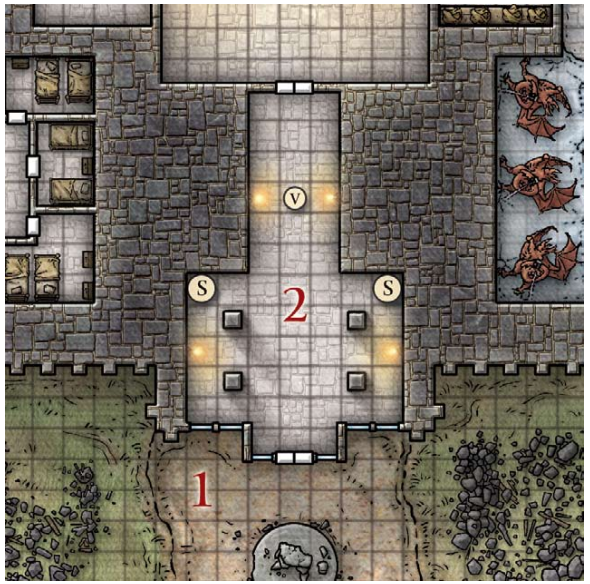
Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet high.

Columns: Four columns, each 3 feet wide, support the ceiling overhead. The columns provide cover.

Fate of Drained Souls

When a victim of the *drain soul* attack fails its second saving throw, the victim's soul is trapped in one of Vlaakith's spine gems. The soul's former body crumbles into dust at the end of the creature's next turn. If the spine is destroyed, each creature trapped in a gem is targeted by an attack: +25 vs. Will; the soul is destroyed. On a miss, the soul remains intact but is trapped in a gem. If a target's soul remains intact within a gem, then the gem glows with faint inner light and reveals an image of a tiny figure inside. This gem can be used as part of the Raise Dead ritual, reducing the component cost by half. The Raise Dead ritual can still bring back a target whose soul is destroyed.

Stained-Glass Windows: The stained glass windows are not made of glass at all. They are instead congealed hatred. Any creature that starts its turn in a square adjacent to the window makes a melee basic attack or a charge attack against the closest creature and treats allies as enemies for the purpose of opportunity attacks until the start of the creature's next turn. Each window has AC 5 Fortitude 10, Reflex 5; hp 5. A destroyed window loses this effect.



Red Sentinels

Encounter Level 19 (12,000 XP)

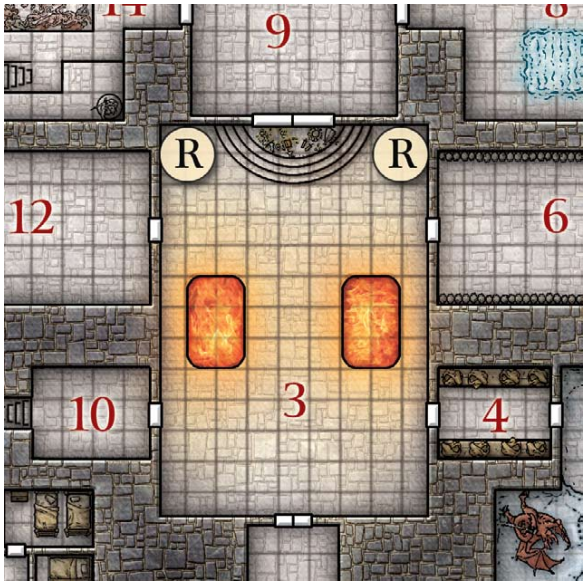
Setup

2 adult red dragons (R)

The emperor uses these dragons to protect the deeper chambers. These dragons are descendants of Zetch'r'r's own red dragon steed.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

Heat blasts you from this blazing chamber. Through the heat mirage created by two fiery pools, you make out the hulking forms of two red dragons.



2 Adult Red Dragons (R)	**Level 17 Solo Soldier**
Large natural magical beast (dragon)	XP 8,000 each
Initiative +13	**Senses** Perception +15; darkvision
HP 750; **Bloodied** 375; see also *bloodied breath*	
AC 33; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 29	
Resist 20 fire	
Saving Throws +5	
Speed 6, fly 8 (hover), overland flight 12	
Action Points 2	
Bite (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**	
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage plus 3d6 fire damage.	
Claw (standard; at-will)	
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d8 + 7 damage.	
Double Attack (standard; at-will)	
The dragon makes two claw attacks.	
Tail Strike (immediate reaction, when an enemy moves to a position where it flanks the red dragon; at-will)	
The dragon attacks the enemy with its tail: reach 2; +20 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.	
Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**	
Close blast 5; +20 vs. Reflex; 2d12 + 6 fire damage. *Miss:* Half damage.	
Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire**	
The dragon's breath weapon recharges, and the dragon uses it immediately.	
Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**	
Close burst 5; targets enemies; +20 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a -2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Bluff +14, Insight +15, Intimidate +19	
Str 25 (+14)	**Dex** 19 (+11) **Wis** 16 (+10)
Con 22 (+13)	**Int** 13 (+8) **Cha** 14 (+9)

Tactics

The two dragons are accustomed to working with each other. When the PCs enter, they take to the air, flying 20 feet above the floor, and close to deliver their *breath weapon* attacks against the largest group of characters. They then spend an action point each to charge a character they hit with their *breath weapons*.

After, both dragons maneuver to position themselves on opposite sides of the PCs. The first dragon uses *frightful presence* to send the PCs fleeing while the other dragon bites any character that moves past it. On the round following, they do the same thing, but in reverse.

The dragons save their second action points for when they are bloodied, using them to combine bite attacks with their *breath weapons*, or, failing that, combine a bite with *double attack*.

Features of the Area

Illumination: The pools of fire fill this room with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling in this room is 50 feet high.

Dais: A dais stands on the opposite side of the room, flanked by the dragons. The steps up are steep and count as difficult terrain.

Iron Doors: The iron doors are not locked, but they are super-hot. Characters opening them by hand take 10 fire damage.

Fiery Pools: Two pools of naphtha burn. A creature that enters or starts its turn adjacent to a pool takes 5 fire damage, while a creature that enters or starts its turn in a pool takes 10 fire damage and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

The fires are so intense that a creature standing in or behind them is lightly obscured.

Heat: Heat from the burning pools imposes a –2 penalty to all attack rolls to all creatures that do not have resist fire of 10 or more.

Treasure: The dragons' hoard consists of treasure parcels 14, 18, and 19, all of which sit in a pile on the dais.

THE FREEZER

Encounter Level 20 (14,000 XP)

SETUP

3 ice devils (I)
1 winterdeath dracolich (W)

This foul chamber holds dragon carcasses for later animation. The dracolich lairing here (a red dragon in life) has endured terrible torments from the ice devils, hence its lesser state.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

A blast of cold greets you when you enter this large chamber. Several ice-blue insectoid humanoids turn to look at you, their longspears raised in challenge, but the hulking red dragon skeleton rimed with ice rising from the frozen floor commands your attention. Red dragon carcasses hang by their tails from the ceiling.

3 Ice Devils (I) **Level 20 Soldier**
Large immortal humanoid (devil) XP 2,800 each
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +13; darkvision
Cold Aura (Cold) aura 5; enemies in the aura take a –2 penalty to all attack rolls.
HP 195; **Bloodied** 97
AC 36; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 29
Immune cold; **Resist** 20 fire
Speed 8

⊕ **Icy Longspear** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Weapon**
Reach 3; +27 vs. AC; 1d12 + 7 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

⸸ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 2; +25 vs. AC; 1d6 + 7 damage.

↭ **Chilling Command** (minor; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold**
Close burst 5; +23 vs. Will; the target takes ongoing 5 cold damage and is immobilized (save ends both).

↭ **Freezing Breath** (standard; recharge ⚀ ⚁ ⚂ ⚅) ✦ **Cold**
Close blast 5; +23 vs. Fortitude; 2d6 + 7 cold damage, and the target is slowed (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Endurance +23
Str 25 (+17) **Dex** 22 (+16) **Wis** 17 (+13)
Con 27 (+18) **Int** 15 (+12) **Cha** 19 (+14)
Equipment longspear

Winterdeath Dracolich (W) **Level 20 Elite Controller**
Huge natural magical beast (dragon, undead) XP 5,600
Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
HP 384; **Bloodied** 192; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 34; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30
Immune disease, fear, poison; **Resist** 30 cold, 30 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Saving Throws +2
Speed 8, fly 10 (clumsy)
Action Points 1

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
Reach 3; +25 vs. AC; 3d6 + 8 damage. Against an immobilized target, this attack deals 3d6 extra cold and necrotic damage.

↭ **Bloodied Breath** (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The winterdeath dracolich's breath weapon recharges and it uses it immediately.

↭ **Breath Weapon** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
The winterdeath dracolich breathes a blast of icy black necrotic energy: close blast 5; +23 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 cold and necrotic damage, and the target is immobilized until the end of the dracolich's next turn. *Miss:* Half damage. *Effect:* The target loses any cold or necrotic resistance it has (save ends).

↭ **Unnerving Presence** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 5; +23 vs. Will; the target moves up to its speed away from the winterdeath dracolich by the safest possible route and takes a –2 penalty to all attack rolls until the end of the dracolich's next turn.

↭ **Winterdeath Corona** (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Cold, Necrotic**
Close burst 3; +23 vs. Fortitude; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 cold damage (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Draconic
Skills Arcana +18, Endurance +22, History +18, Insight +19, Intimidate +18, Religion +18
Str 25 (+17) **Dex** 22 (+16) **Wis** 19 (+14)
Con 24 (+17) **Int** 16 (+13) **Cha** 17 (+13)

Tactics

The dracolich uses its *breath weapon* and spends its action point to attack with *unnerving presence*. It then alternates between *winterdeath corona* and bite attacks while waiting for its *breath weapon* to recharge.

The ice devils position themselves to hit their enemies with *freezing breath* followed by *chilling command*, stabbing their enemies with longspears while waiting for their powers to recharge.

Features of the Area

Illumination: This room is dark.

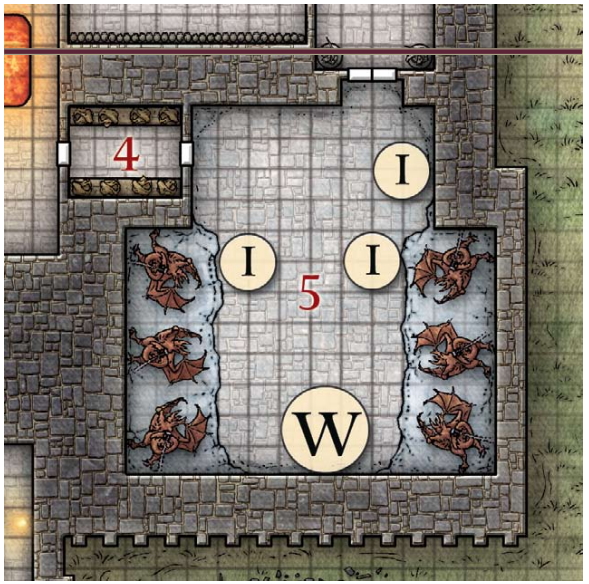
Ceiling: The ceiling is 30 feet high.

Dragon Corpse: Large dead red dragons hang by their tails from hooks set in the ceiling. A character can climb a corpse with a DC 14 Athletics check. An adjacent character can swing the corpse as an attack: level + 4 vs. Reflex; the target is pushed 1 square and knocked prone.

Uttercold: Two areas of the floor are covered with *uttercold* (elemental ice). The squares count as difficult terrain and any creature entering a square containing uttercold takes 10 cold damage. If a square of uttercold is included in a fire burst or blast attack, it erupts in scalding steam.

Scalding Steam ✦ Fire, Zone
Burst 1 centered on triggering square; all creatures in burst; +23 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 7 fire damage. The burst creates a zone of steam that lasts until the end of the triggering attacker's next turn. All squares in the zone count as being lightly obscured. If multiple squares are affected, overlapping areas count as being heavily obscured.

Treasure: The dracolich has a modest hoard consisting of treasure parcels 13 and 17.



CURIOSITIES

Encounter Level 21 (16,300 XP)

SETUP

1 astral stalker (A)
1 gibbering abomination (G)
2 marut sentinels (M)
1 breath of Tiamat (B)

To expand his forces, Zetch'r'r scours the Astral Sea for potential creatures to add to his stables. He hopes to either replace the draconic servants (if he ever wriggles out from under Tiamat's claw) or use them against the rebels that endanger his rule. He posts two marut sentinels in this room to ensure the captives do not escape. The gibbering abomination is clearly visible through the transparent walls of its prison; the astral stalker is invisible, making its prison appear empty.

When the PCs enter this room and can see the cages, read:

Two squat humanoids with steel skin and wielding greatswords stand guard in this chamber. Two shimmering cubes stand to either side. Only one cube is occupied, and inside is a floating mass of flesh, eyes, and tentacles.

Perception Check
DC 22 *You see a control panel on the wall.*

Astral Stalker (A) **Level 22 Elite Lurker**
Medium immortal humanoid XP 8,300

Initiative +23 **Senses** Perception +18; blindsight 10
HP 314; **Bloodied** 157
AC 38; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 38, **Will** 32
Saving Throws +2
Speed 10, climb 6
Action Points 1

Claw (standard; at-will)
+27 vs. AC; 2d6 + 8 damage, and the astral stalker can choose to designate the target as its quarry (see *stalker's quarry*).

Throat Dart (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison**
Ranged 5/10; +29 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 damage, and the target takes ongoing 5 poison damage and is slowed (save ends both). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target is immobilized instead of slowed (save ends). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target is stunned instead of immobilized (save ends).

Quick Claws (standard; at-will)
Against a slowed or immobilized target, the astral stalker makes two claw attacks.

Combat Advantage
The astral stalker's melee attacks deal 2d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Invisibility (standard; at-will) ✦ **Illusion**
The astral stalker is invisible until it attacks.

Stalker's Quarry (minor; at-will)
The astral stalker knows the exact location of a creature it has designated as its quarry. The astral stalker can have only one quarry at a time, but the power works across any distance and even crosses planar boundaries.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Supernal
Skills Stealth +24
Str 22 (+17) **Dex** 26 (+19) **Wis** 15 (+13)
Con 19 (+15) **Int** 8 (+10) **Cha** 10 (+11)

TACTICS

The marut sentinels do not attack right away, but they try to block access into the room. They respond to attempts at conversation with silence. They know what will happen if either they or the adventurers make an attack in this room, so they are prepared to get out from the trap's blast.

Gibbering Abomination (G) **Level 18 Controller**
Medium aberrant magical beast XP 2,000

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +13; all-around vision, darkvision
Unnatural Utterances aura 5; any enemy that starts its turn within the aura takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls.
HP 168; **Bloodied** 84
AC 32; **Fortitude** 31, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 30
Speed 6, fly 4 (hover; maximum altitude 1)

Tentacle (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Reach 2; +22 vs. AC; 2d6 + 5 damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends).

Gibbering (free, once on the gibbering abomination's turn before it takes other actions; at-will) ✦ **Psychic**
Close burst 5; deafened creatures are immune; +20 vs. Will; the target is dazed until the end of the gibbering abomination's next turn.

Eye of Despair (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚄ ⚃) ✦ **Psychic**
Ranged 10; +20 vs. Will; 3d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Combat Advantage
The gibbering abomination deals 2d6 extra psychic damage on melee and ranged attacks against any target granting combat advantage to it.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —
Str 20 (+14) **Dex** 18 (+13) **Wis** 19 (+13)
Con 16 (+12) **Int** 11 (+9) **Cha** 12 (+10)

Once a character makes an attack, the maruts fight back, laying into their enemies with *double attack*, while the trap randomly disgorges acid into the room.

If an enterprising character uses the control panel to disable the trap, the force cages vanish, loosing the creatures they contain. Neither the gibbering abomination nor the astral stalker see the maruts as allies, but they treat each other as allies for the purpose of their powers and opportunity attacks.

The gibbering abomination begins *gibbering* on its turn and uses *eye of despair* against ranged attackers. While waiting for this power to recharge, it hits foes in its reach with its tentacles, moving to get combat advantage with the astral stalker when possible.

The astral stalker is invisible until it makes an attack. It moves to where it can get a clear shot at nondefender if possible, using *stalker's quarry* first and then *throat dart*. It then spends an action point to charge its quarry. It attacks using *quick claws* until its quarry succeeds on a saving throw, at which point the astral stalker uses *invisibility* to skulk away and set up its next attack.

Breath of Tiamat **Level 18 Blaster**
Trap XP 2,000

Trap: When any creature makes an attack in this room, random pillars burst up through the floor and spray the area with acid.

Perception
✦ DC 20: A character notices discolored tiles in the trapped squares.

Trigger
When a creature makes an attack in this room, the trap activates and rolls initiative.

Initiative +8

Floor Burst
Free Action **Melee** 1
Trigger: A creature stands in the trap's square when it first makes its attack.
Target: The triggering creature
Effect: The creature is pushed 1 square and is knocked prone.

Acid Spray ✦ Acid
Standard Action **Close** blast 5
Special: Roll 1d4. The square matching the number erupts when a steel column mounted with a sprayer bursts through the floor (see below). The blast originates from this square.
Target: Each creature in blast
Attack: +21 vs. Reflex
Hit: 3d8 + 5 acid damage, and ongoing 15 acid damage (save ends).

Countermeasures
✦ Turning a dial in the center of the control panel deactivates the trap and also negates the cages containing the astral stalker and the gibbering abomination.

2 Marut Sentinels (M) **Level 18 Soldier**
Medium immortal humanoid XP 2,000
Initiative +16 **Senses** Perception +20; truesight 10
HP 175; **Bloodied** 87
Regeneration 10
AC 35; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 30
Immune sleep; **Resist** 10 thunder
Speed 8, fly 4 (hover), teleport 4
⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Thunder, Weapon**
+24 vs. AC; 1d10 + 8 damage plus 1d6 thunder damage, the target is pushed 1 square, and the target is marked until the end of the marut sentinel's next turn.
⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅)
The marut sentinel makes two greatsword attacks.
Alignment Unaligned **Languages** Supernal
Skills Endurance +20, Intimidate +15
Str 30 (+19) **Dex** 21 (+14) **Wis** 23 (+15)
Con 23 (+15) **Int** 12 (+10) **Cha** 13 (+10)
Equipment greatsword

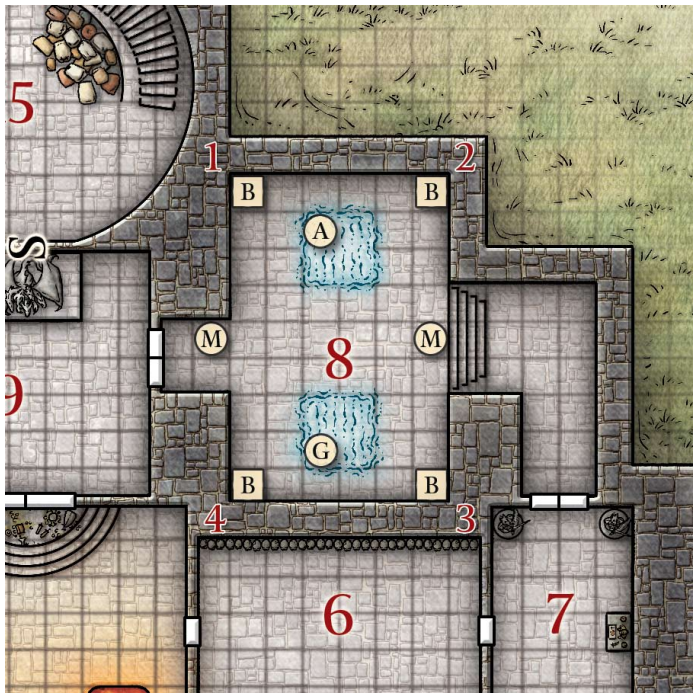
Features of the Area

Illumination: Everburning torches fill the room with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling is 20 feet tall.

Stairs: The stairs count as difficult terrain while ascending them and normal terrain while descending them.

Force Cages: Two cages are positioned on either side of the room. The cages' wall of force do not block line of sight, but they do block line of effect. Each cage has AC 4, Fortitude 12, Reflex 4, hp 200. A *dispel magic* spell automatically destroys a cage. The only way to lift the cages is by turning the dial on the control panel to deactivate the trap. Sound cannot pass through the cages while they are active.



Emerald Statue

Encounter Level 20 (14,000 XP)

Setup

1 githyanki knight (G)
1 kryizoth fire mage (K)
2 tlaikith forlorn (T)

Emperor Zetch'r'r placed his most loyal guards in this chamber to safeguard the passage to his personal quarters. The githyanki are alerted if combat occurs in any adjacent chamber and ready actions to attack whenever an enemy enters the room. The githyanki knight readies *telekinetic fist*, the fire mage readies *immolation*, and the forlorn ready their silver swords.

Although this combat begins in this room, it can easily spill back into adjacent rooms as the guardians work to keep the adventurers away from their master.

When the PCs enter this room, read:

An enormous idol of Tiamat dominates this otherwise bare chamber. Two githyanki stand guard before it. One wears antiquated plate armor and wields a silvery blade. The other is dressed in scorched robes and is obviously undead. Also in this room are two ghostly githyanki knights, echoes of the living warrior opposite them. They turn as one, ready for the attack.

Githyanki Knight (G) **Level 21 Elite Controller**
Medium natural humanoid XP 6,400

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +22; darkvision
HP 396; **Bloodied** 198
AC 35; **Fortitude** 34, **Reflex** 31, **Will** 33
Immune fear; **Resist** 5 psychic, 5 radiant
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against charm effects)
Speed 5
Action Points 1

True Silver Sword (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+26 vs. AC; 1d12 + 8 damage plus 1d8 psychic damage (crit 3d12 + 20 + 8 psychic).

Dark Smite (standard; recharges when first bloodied) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Targets an immobilized creature; +25 vs. Fortitude; 2d12 + 8 damage plus 1d12 psychic damage, and the target is pushed 5 squares and knocked prone.

Double Attack (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
The githyanki knight makes two *true silver sword* attacks.

Reactive Grab (immediate reaction, when an enemy enters a square adjacent to the githyanki knight; encounter)
The githyanki knight makes a *telekinetic fist* attack against the triggering enemy. This attack doesn't provoke opportunity attacks.

Telekinetic Fist (standard; at-will)
Ranged 5; +25 vs. Fortitude; the target is immobilized (save ends). *Each Failed Saving Throw:* The githyanki knight slides the target 5 squares.

Dimensional Exile (free, when the githyanki knight hits with a melee attack; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The target is sent to a pocket dimension (save ends). The target is removed from play and cannot take actions. When the target ends the effect, it returns to the space it last occupied or the closest unoccupied space.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 27 (+18) **Dex** 21 (+15) **Wis** 24 (+17)
Con 22 (+16) **Int** 16 (+13) **Cha** 20 (+15)
Equipment plate armor, *true silver sword*

Kryizoth Fire Mage (K) **Level 20 Controller**
Medium natural humanoid (undead), githyanki XP 2,800

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +19; darkvision
Black Flame Shroud (**Fire, Necrotic**) aura 1; any enemy that enters or starts its turn within the aura takes 10 fire and necrotic damage.
HP 190; **Bloodied** 95
AC 34; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 33
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 fire, 20 necrotic; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant
Speed 6; see also *dimension step*

Blackflame Touch (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire, Necrotic**
+24 vs. Reflex; 1d6 + 7 fire and necrotic damage, and the target loses 1 healing surge.

Rotting Missile (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic**
Ranged 20; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d8 + 7 necrotic damage, and the target is slowed and takes a -2 penalty to AC (save ends both).

Immolation (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 10; +24 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 7 fire damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends). *Miss:* Half damage. *Each Failed Saving Throw:* Each enemy adjacent to the target takes 10 fire damage.

Telekinetic Leap (move; encounter)
Ranged 10; the kryizoth fire mage or one ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.

Heat Mirage (immediate interrupt, when hit by a melee or ranged attack; encounter) ✦ **Illusion**
The kryizoth fire mage gains a +2 bonus to all defenses until the end of its next turn.

Dimension Step (minor; recharge ⚃ ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Teleportation**
The kryizoth fire mage teleports 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Skills Arcana+22, History +19
Str 17 (+13) **Dex** 20 (+15) **Wis** 19 (+14)
Con 22 (+16) **Int** 25 (+17) **Cha** 14 (+12)
Equipment robes, staff

2 Tlaikith Forlorn (T)		Level 19 Soldier
Medium natural humanoid (undead), githyanki		XP 2,400 each
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +12; darkvision	
Dimensional Bar aura 1; creatures in the aura cannot teleport, and creatures cannot teleport into the aura.		
HP 125; **Bloodied** 62		
AC 33; **Fortitude** 32, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 30		
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** 20 necrotic; insubstantial; **Vulnerable** 10 radiant		
Speed 5, fly 5 (hover)		
ⓘ **Silver Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**		
+24 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 7 damage, and the target is marked until the end of the tlaikith forlorn's next turn.		
⸸ **Soul Strike** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Weapon**		
+24 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target is stunned (save ends).		
⤲ **Telekinetic Leap** (move; encounter)		
Ranged 10; the tlaikith forlorn or one ally within range can fly up to 5 squares.		
⤲ **Telekinetic Pull** (minor; encounter)		
Ranged 5; +24 vs. Fortitude; the target is pulled 5 squares.		
⤳ **Silver Arc** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**		
Close burst 1; +24 vs. Reflex; 2d10 + 7 damage, and the target is dazed (save ends).		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech, telepathy 10	
Str 24 (+16)	**Dex** 18 (+13)	**Wis** 16 (+12)
Con 19 (+13)	**Int** 13 (+10)	**Cha** 21 (+14)
Equipment plate armor, silver sword		

Tactics

The githyanki knight uses *telekinetic fist* to pin down a defender, and then closes on a ranged attacker for melee. If the target of its *telekinetic fist* fails its save to end the immobilized effect, the knight slides it to an adjacent space and attacks using *dark smite* and then pins the target once more.

The fire mage keeps her distance from the forlorn so she can use *dimension step* if needed. She leads with her *immolation* power. She helps maneuver her allies into the best position using *telekinetic leap* and then punishes ranged attackers with her *rotting missile*.

The forlorn use *telekinetic pull* to drag soft enemies into their reach and then hit them with *soul strike*. They then move out of the room and pull their targets with them to lure the PCs to the emerald statue.

Features of the Area

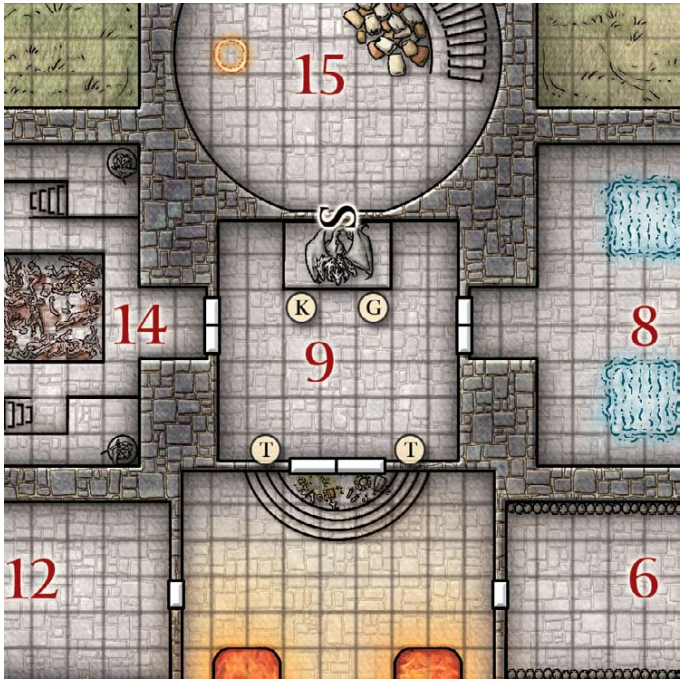
Illumination: The emerald idol glows with inner luminance, filling the room with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling here is 20 feet tall.

Emerald Idol: The idol looms over the chamber and is filled with Tiamat's malice. Nongithyanki starting their turns in spaces adjacent to the idol are subject to an attack.

ⓘ **Tiamat's Judgment** ✦ **Poison**
Melee 1; +25 vs. Fortitude; 10 poison damage, and the target is pushed 1 square.

The statue has AC 3, Fortitude 15, Reflex 3, hp 200. Characters can enter a statue's space by spending 3 squares of movement. Searching the statue and succeeding on a DC 25 Perception check reveals the entire thing pivots to expose the chamber beyond.



Those Who Are About to Die

Encounter Level 19 (12,800 XP)

Setup

2 chosen gish'sarath (S)
8 chosen githwarriors (G)

No matter the direction from which the adventurers approach, the githyanki here react quickly to the arrival of intruders.

2 Chosen Gish'sarath (S) Level 18 Elite Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 4,000 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +16
HP 342; **Bloodied** 171
AC 32; **Fortitude** 29, **Reflex** 30, **Will** 31
Saving Throws +2 (+4 against charm effects)
Speed 5; see also *astral stride*
Action Points 1

⊕ **Silver Longsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+23 vs. AC; 1d8 + 7 damage, plus 1d8 psychic damage.

⸸ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
The gish'sarath makes two *silver longsword* attacks.

⤙ **Force Bolt** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Force**
Ranged 10; +21 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 5 force damage and the gish'sarath pushes the target 1 square.

⤙ **Storm of Stars** (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The gish'sarath makes four attacks, no more than two of these against a single target; ranged 5; +23 vs. AC; 2d8 + 6 fire damage.

Astral Stride (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
The gish'sarath teleports 6 squares and gains the insubstantial and phasing qualities until the start of its next turn.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills Arcana +19, History +16, Insight +16
Str 17 (+12) **Dex** 15 (+11) **Wis** 15 (+11)
Con 19 (+13) **Int** 21 (+14) **Cha** 19 (+13)
Equipment chainmail, silver longsword

8 Githwarriors (G) Level 16 Minion Skirmisher
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 350 each

Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +10
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.
AC 30; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 26
Saving Throws +2 against charm
Speed 6; see also *telekinetic stride*

⊕ **Greatsword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
+21 vs. AC; 12 damage.

⤙ **Crossbow** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Weapon**
Ranged 15/30; +21 vs. AC; 12 damage.

Telekinetic Jump (move; encounter)
The githwarrior flies 5 squares.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 25 (+15) **Dex** 20 (+13) **Wis** 15 (+10)
Con 15 (+10) **Int** 12 (+9) **Cha** 14 (+10)
Equipment scale mail, greatsword, crossbow with 10 bolts

Tactics

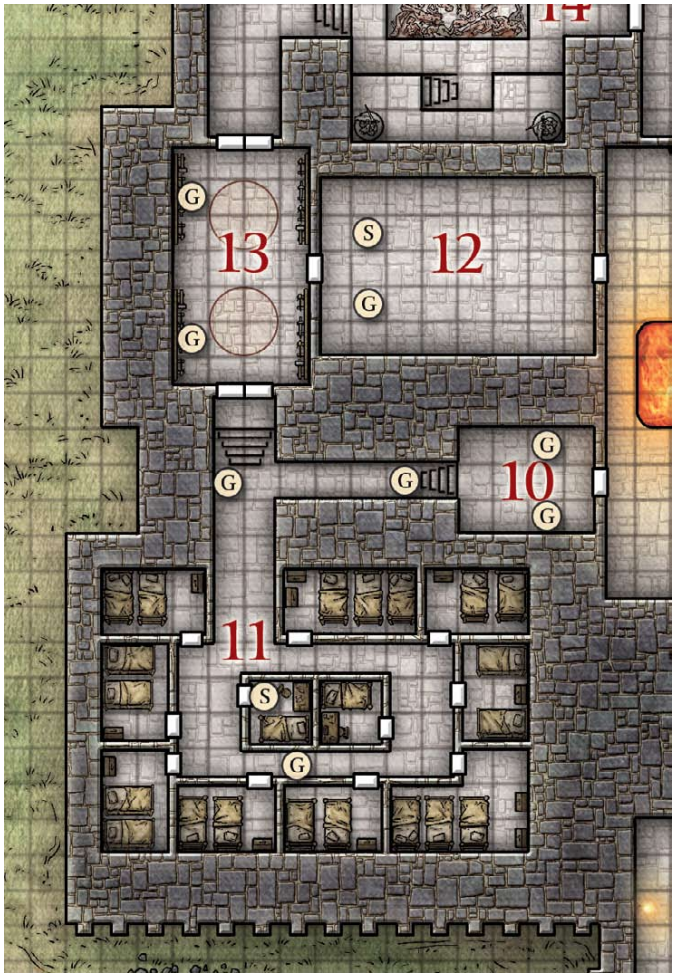
The githyanki use the cramped quarters to their best advantage, and use *telekinetic leap* to fly over their allies' heads and hit the enemies from behind.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Everburning torches in iron sconces every 15 feet fill the area with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceiling in room 10 is 30 feet tall. The ceiling in the hall and barracks (room 11) beyond is 50 feet tall. The ceiling in room 13 is just 20 feet tall.

Stairs: The stairs descending from room 10 to the hall beyond are steep and cost 3 squares of movement to ascend or descend. The stairs leading up to room 13 are difficult terrain while ascending them and normal terrain while descending them.



Vicious Storm

Encounter Level 21 (17,800 XP)

Setup

1 caller in darkness (C)
1 primal storm (P)
2 storm devils (S)

The devils and the primal storm await their master's pleasure in this room. When the PCs enter, place only the primal storm and the storm devils. The caller in darkness doesn't join the fight until one of three things happen: either storm devils are slain, the primal storm is slain, or a creature falls into the pit.

Neither the primal storm nor the storm devils are aware of the caller in darkness. The undead creature formed from the terrified githyanki executed in this awful room. While powerful, it fears the storm devils and will not ascend from the pit unless forced.

The cramped quarters make maneuvering in this room difficult, and so the encounter might spill into adjoining rooms.

When the PCs can see in this room, read:

An appalling reek greets you when you enter this chamber—a stench transcending ordinary decay. Two ledges flank a deep pit occupying the room's center. Statues depicting rearing blue dragons stand in the corners on the ledges. Just as you make out two winged humanoids wielding tridents, a crackling orb of lightning comes to life, slashing the air with energy.

Caller in Darkness (C) **Level 19 Elite Soldier**
Large shadow animate (undead) XP 4,800
Initiative +13 **Senses** Perception +16; darkvision
HP 253; **Bloodied** 126
AC 33; **Fortitude** 33, **Reflex** 28, **Will** 33
Immune disease, poison; **Resist** insubstantial
Saving Throws +2
Speed fly 8 (hover); phasing
Action Points 1

⊕ **Spirit Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic**
Reach 2; +23 vs. AC; 1d10 + 7 necrotic damage, and ongoing 10 psychic damage (save ends).

⊕ **Double Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic**
The caller in darkness makes two *spirit bite* attacks.

⊕ **Steal Essence** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic**
Reach 2; targets a creature marked by the caller in darkness; +22 vs. Fortitude; 1d10 + 9 necrotic damage, and ongoing 5 psychic damage (save ends). *First Failed Saving Throw:* The target takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and is weakened (save ends both). *Second Failed Saving Throw:* The target takes ongoing 10 psychic damage and is stunned instead of weakened (save ends both).

Advantage of Fear (minor 1/round; at-will) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets one creature; the target is marked and grants combat advantage to the caller in darkness (save ends both); see also *steal essence.*

Soulstorm (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Necrotic, Psychic**
Close burst 2; +22 vs. Reflex; 1d10 + 9 psychic damage plus 1d10 + 9 necrotic damage. In addition, a target that grants combat advantage to the caller in darkness takes ongoing 5 psychic damage and ongoing 5 necrotic damage (save ends both).

Alignment Chaotic evil **Languages** Common
Str 24 (+16) **Dex** 18 (+13) **Wis** 24 (+16)
Con 21 (+14) **Int** 10 (+9) **Cha** 25 (+16)

Primal Storm, Blue Dragon (P) **Level 20 Artillery**
Large natural animate (construct) XP 2,800
Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +14; tremorsense 5
HP 146; **Bloodied** 73
AC 32; **Fortitude** 30, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 30
Immune poison; **Resist** 30 lightning
Speed 10, fly 4

⊕ **Slam** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
Reach 2; +26 vs. AC; 2d8 + 8 lightning damage.

Storm Bolt (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**
The primal storm targets up to three creatures; the first target must be within 20 squares of the primal storm, the second must be within 10 squares of the first, and the third target within 10 squares of the second; +25 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 8 lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not dazed.

Lightning Step (standard; recharge ⚅) ✦ **Lightning, Teleportation**
Close burst 2; +21 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 8 lightning damage, and the target is dazed until the end of its next turn. *Miss:* Half damage, and the target is not dazed. *Effect:* The primal storm teleports 8 squares after making this attack.

Alignment Unaligned **Languages** —
Str 17 (+13) **Dex** 26 (+18) **Wis** 19 (+14)
Con 20 (+15) **Int** 7 (+8) **Cha** 7 (+8)

2 Storm Devils (S)		Level 23 Artillery
Medium immortal humanoid (devil)		XP 5,100 each
Initiative +18	**Senses** Perception +17; darkvision	
HP 169; **Bloodied** 84		
AC 37; **Fortitude** 35, **Reflex** 34, **Will** 33		
Resist 20 fire, 20 lightning, 20 thunder		
Speed 7, fly 7 (clumsy)		
Trident (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning, Weapon**		
+26 vs. Reflex; 2d6 + 8 damage, and ongoing 10 lightning damage, and the target is dazed (save ends both).		
Lightning Fork (standard; at-will) ✦ **Lightning**		
Requires trident; ranged 20; +28 vs. Reflex; 3d6 + 8 lightning damage.		
Infernal Thunderclap (standard; recharge ⚄ ⚅) ✦ **Lightning, Thunder**		
Area burst 2 within 20; +26 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 6 lightning and thunder damage, and the target is pushed 3 squares from the origin square and dazed until the end of its next turn.		
Cyclone (free, when first bloodied; encounter)		
The storm devil shifts 3 squares, and any Medium or smaller enemy adjacent to the storm devil at the start of the move is knocked prone.		
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Supernal	
Skills Stealth +23		
Str 20 (+16)	**Dex** 25 (+18)	**Wis** 22 (+17)
Con 25 (+18)	**Int** 16 (+14)	**Cha** 17 (+14)
Equipment trident		

Tactics

The primal storm—living lightning formed from a blue dragon's breath—loiters near the ceiling, flying about and raging with contempt for the intruders. It opens with *storm bolt*, targeting three creatures it can see with this deadly attack, and flies 2 squares so it can maintain its altitude. The primal storm stays near the ceiling, blasting the characters each round until a creature engages it. If it is confronted by two or more enemies in melee, it uses *lightning step* to slip away. The primal storm pursues enemies that flee from this room.

While the primal storm dances across the ceiling, the storm devils use *infernal thunderclap* to push the characters into the pit. They avoid melee when possible, attacking with *lightning fork* until their *infernal thunderclap* recharges. Each round, they move across their ledges to get the best shot possible.

When the caller in darkness joins the combat, it flies to just above the pit and hovers there. If the storm devils are present, it treats them as enemies just as it does the PCs. Each round, it starts by using *advantage of fear* against an enemy it can see, giving preference to the adventurers first, specifically divine characters. It moves so it can reach a creature it has marked and attacks using *steal essence*, and then spends its action point to use *double bite*. Thereafter, the caller in darkness marks another enemy and uses *steal essence* or *double bite* until destroyed.

Features of the Area

Illumination: This room is dark.

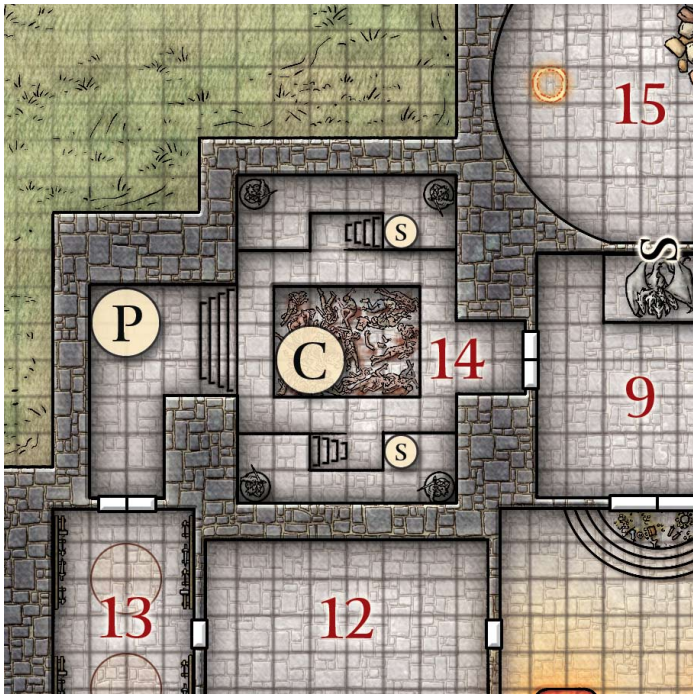
Ceiling: The ceiling here is 20 feet high, or 10 feet above the ledges.

Ledges: Ledges on either side of the room stand 10 feet above the floor. Climbing a ledge requires a DC 14 Athletics check.

Stairs: The stairs are treated as difficult terrain while ascending them and normal terrain while descending them.

Pit: A 40-foot pit yawns wide in the center of the room. The pit is actually 50 feet deep, but heaps of githyanki corpses fill the bottom 10 feet and reduce the falling distance. A character that falls into the pit activates the caller in darkness in addition to taking 4d10 damage from the fall. A character can climb out of the pit with a DC 25 Athletics check.

Statues: Four statues depicting blue dragons stand in the room's four corners. A statue has AC 5, Fortitude 10, Reflex 5, hp 40.



The Emperor's Redoubt

Encounter Level 23 (28,600 XP)

Setup

Emperor Zetch'r'r (Z)
4 Handmaidens (H)
Vraxanault, the Red Terror (V)

The growing unrest troubles Tiamat, and to ensure Zetch'r'r is getting his house in order, she has sent Vraxanault, her red dragon exarch, to gauge Tu'narath's troubles. The Separatists choose this time to strike, coordinating their efforts with the PCs. So when the adventurers enter this room, the dragon interrogates the emperor even as *astral skiffs* battle knights on pact dragons in the starry sky overhead.

When the PCs enter through the secret door, read:

The door opens onto a lavish chamber. Soft pillows cover the floor near the stairs that trace the interior wall and lead up to the level above. A heavy brocade curtain conceals the side of the room opposite from where you enter. A disk inset into the floor shines with blue light.

From above, you hear voices. Both are likely male, with the first voice, cultured and patient, nearly drowned out by the louder booming voice. From what you can make out, the two discuss Tu'narath's troubles.

Characters looking up through the hole in the ceiling can make out a gargantuan red dragon. When it speaks, fire puffs from its toothy maw. The characters can ascend the stairs as they wish, but call for DC 34 Stealth checks. If a character fails, the massive dragon thunders, "It seems you have other guests. Attend to them. Your house does not seem to be in order, and our queen will be displeased." The red dragon exarch wings its way out through the roof, right into the raging battle overhead. If the PCs make it past the dragon and reach the third floor (such as by using the teleporter), the exarch growls, "deal with them" and then flies away as above. The characters don't need to fight the exarch now, but if they wish to, use the statistics presented on the next page.

When the PCs reach the second floor, read:

An immense red dragon reclines on the floor here. Behind, lying in piles, is its hoard. More stairs lead up to the level above.

When the PCs can see the third floor, read:

Banners cover the walls of this wide room. An iron throne flanked by burning braziers stands at one side, while banners cover the walls all around. Overhead, there is no ceiling affording a good look at the raging battle above. Astral skiffs maneuver, launching volleys at pact dragons and their riders. The githyanki are tearing themselves apart.

When the PCs first see Zetch'r'r, read:

The githyanki before you can only be Zetch'r'r. He has the bearing of a veteran warrior and is not slowed by the black plate armor covering his body. A crude iron crown rests on his brow, a ruby-encrusted scepter hangs from his weapon belt, and a silver sword rests easy in his hand. He glowers at you with his one good eye—the other is gone and in its place is a fat onyx stone.

"You are a troublesome company. I credit you for your persistence, but now . . . now, it is time for you to die."

Attending Zetch'r'r are four handmaidens, fanatical githyanki warriors with intricate tattoos covering their bodies. They wield long, serpentine daggers.

4 Handmaidens (H)	**Level 17 Minion Skirmisher**
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki	XP 400 each
Initiative +15	**Senses** Perception +9
HP 1; a missed attack never damages a minion.	
AC 31; **Fortitude** 28, **Reflex** 29, **Will** 32	
Saving Throws +2 against charm effects	
Speed 6	
ⓘ **Poisoned Dagger** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Weapon**	
+22 vs. AC; 8 damage plus 5 poison damage.	
✧ **Scream of Vengeance** (when reduced to 0 hit points)	
Close burst 10; each ally in the burst gains a +2 bonus to attack rolls until the end of its next turn.	
Telekinetic Jump (move; encounter)	
The handmaiden flies up to 5 squares.	
Alignment Evil	**Languages** Common, Deep Speech
Str 11 (+8)	**Dex** 21 (+13) **Wis** 13 (+9)
Con 18 (+12)	**Int** 10 (+8) **Cha** 24 (+15)
Equipment robes, poisoned dagger	

Emperor Zetch'r'r (Z) Level 23 Elite Soldier (Leader)
Medium natural humanoid, githyanki XP 10,200

Initiative +15 **Senses** Perception +18
Despair (Fear) aura 1; any enemy within the aura takes a –2 penalty to all defenses and saving throws.
HP 428; **Bloodied** 214
AC 39; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 32, **Will** 36
Saving Throws +2
Speed 6
Action Points 1

⊕ **Silver Sword** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
+30 vs. AC; 2d6 + 6 damage plus 2d6 psychic damage, and the target is marked until the end of Zetch'r'r's next turn. Against an immobilized target, this attack deals 4d6 extra damage and slides the target 2 squares.

⊕ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Poison, Psychic, Weapon**
Zetch'r'r makes a *silver sword* attack against two different targets.

⊕ **Parrying Maneuver** (standard; requires silver sword; at-will) ✦ **Psychic, Weapon**
Zetch'r'r makes a *silver sword* attack; on a hit, the target also grants combat advantage to Zetch'r'r until the end of his next turn.

Folded Space (move; encounter) ✦ **Teleportation**
Ranged 5; no attack roll; Zetch'r'r and the target swap spaces.

Telekinetic Vise (standard; recharges when first bloodied)
Ranged 5; +28 vs. Fortitude; 2d10 + 8 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

Telekinetic Thrust (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚅ ⚃)
Close burst 1; targets enemies; +28 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 1 square and is immobilized (save ends). *Miss:* The target is pushed 1 square.

Combat Advantage
Emperor Zetch'r'r's melee attacks deal 4d6 extra damage against any target granting combat advantage to him.

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Deep Speech, Draconic
Skills Diplomacy +23, History +18, Insight +18, Intimidate +23
Str 27 (+19) **Dex** 15 (+13) **Wis** 14 (+13)
Con 22 (+17) **Int** 21 (+16) **Cha** 24 (+18)
Equipment full plate, two silver swords, *scepter of Ephelomon* (see sidebar)

Vraxanault, the Red Terror Level 21 Solo Soldier
Elder Red Dragon (V)
Huge natural magical beast (dragon) XP 16,000

Initiative +18 **Senses** Perception +18; darkvision
HP 808; **Bloodied** 404; see also *bloodied breath*
AC 35; **Fortitude** 36, **Reflex** 33, **Will** 30
Resist 25 fire
Saving Throws +5
Speed 8, fly 10 (hover), overland flight 15
Action Points 2

⊕ **Bite** (standard; at-will) ✦ **Fire**
Reach 3; +26 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 plus 4d6 fire damage.

⊕ **Claw** (standard; at-will)
Reach 3; +26 vs. AC; 2d10 + 9 damage.

⊕ **Double Attack** (standard; at-will)
The dragon makes two claw attacks.

Immolate Foe (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚃) ✦ **Fire**
Ranged 20; +26 vs. Reflex; 3d8 + 7 fire damage, and ongoing 10 fire damage (save ends).

Breath Weapon (standard; recharge ⚅ ⚃) ✦ **Fire**
Close blast 5; +24 vs. Reflex; 3d10 + 7 fire damage. *Miss:* Half damage.

Bloodied Breath (free, when first bloodied; encounter) ✦ **Fire**
The dragon's breath weapon recharges automatically, and the dragon uses it immediately.

Frightful Presence (standard; encounter) ✦ **Fear**
Close burst 10; targets enemies; +25 vs. Will; the target is stunned until the end of the dragon's next turn. *Aftereffect:* The target takes a –2 penalty to attack rolls (save ends).

Shock Wave (minor; recharge ⚅ ⚃)
Close burst 5; +24 vs. Fortitude; the target is pushed 5 squares, is knocked prone, and is dazed (save ends). *Aftereffect:* The target is slowed (save ends).

Alignment Evil **Languages** Common, Draconic
Skills Bluff +17, Insight +18, Intimidate +22
Str 27 (+18) **Dex** 21 (+15) **Wis** 16 (+13)
Con 26 (+18) **Int** 15 (+12) **Cha** 15 (+12)

Tactics

The handmaidens rush any adventurers on their floor or use the teleporter to reach characters who fight on the main floor. Their *scream of vengeance* power can reach allies on other levels.

Vraxanault is loyal to Zetch'r'r as long as he possesses the *scepter of Ephelomon*. The dragon uses *frightful presence* and spends an action point to employ his *breath weapon*. If the dragon is faced with two or more attackers at once, it resorts to *shock wave* followed by *immolate foe* or *breath weapon* depending on what it has available.

Zetch'r'r engages the closest enemy from the start, using *telekinetic vice* to lock an enemy down and then strike. He attacks this enemy, closing the distance using *folded space* if necessary, hammering away using his weapons. Zetch'r'r makes good use of the terrain to slide foes off the upper level to fall to the bottom floor. He rips through his opponents with his weapons until all his enemies lay dead or he is destroyed.

Scepter of Ephelomon

This ruby-encrusted golden scepter represents an ancient pact between the githyanki and the red dragons sworn to Tiamat. Ephelomon, Tiamat's former red dragon exarch, entrusted it to Gith (savior of the githyanki people) millennia ago. A powerful relic and potent symbol, the *scepter of Ephelomon* has been part of the ruler's regalia since the days when the first Vlaakith ascended the throne. When Zetch'r'r came to power, though, he quickly discovered the scepter had no power. At first he thought he had been given a false item, but rituals revealed the item's vast magical strength had vanished. What this signaled was that the pact had been broken. Zetch'r'r has hidden this fact since taking power, but he knows if the truth about the pact became known that the dragons would leave and his reign would end, with or without Tiamat's support.

The scepter hangs on Zetch'r'r's belt. During the combat, any character that makes a DC 24 Arcana check (a free action) recognizes the scepter for what it is. A second check against a DC 29 (a standard action) reveals it is powerless. A character can steal the scepter from Zetch'r'r's belt by making a DC 31 Thievery check (with a –10 penalty for the attempt in combat). Once in hand, the scepter can be destroyed: AC 10, Fortitude 5, Reflex 10, Fortitude 5, hp 15.

If the characters destroy the scepter in Vraxanault's line of sight, the dragon roars with rage and abandons the emperor to whatever fate the PCs have in store for him.

Features of the Area

Illumination: Everburning torches in iron sconces along the walls fill the entire tower with bright light.

Ceiling: The ceilings in the first and second floors are 30 feet tall. The third floor has no ceiling, providing a view of the shimmering Astral Sea.

Stairs: Stairs emerge from the wall and wind up and around to the top floor. Spaces containing stairs count as difficult terrain.

Openings: A fall from the top deals 3d10 damage if the creature falls to the second floor or 6d10 if the creature falls all the way to the bottom. A fall from the second floor deals 3d10 damage.

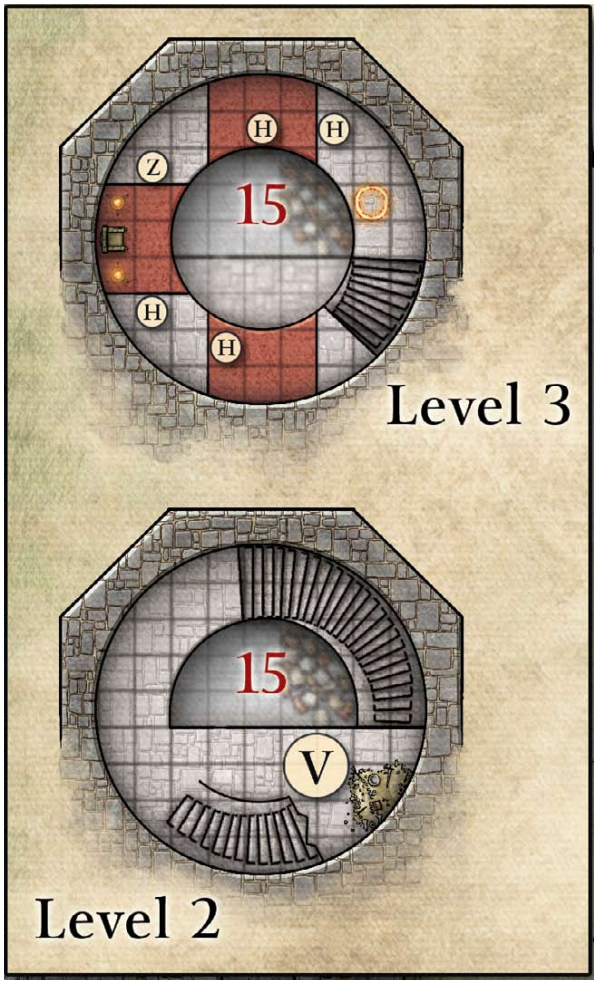
Blood Rock: Where indicated on the tactical map, the floor is made from blood rock. A creature standing in one of these squares can score a critical hit on a natural die roll of 19 or 20.

Teleporters: Two magical gates connect the first floor to the third floor. A creature entering the teleporter's space immediately moves adjacent to the other teleporter's destination square.

Curtain: A thick curtain on the first floor provides Zetch'r'r with privacy. The curtain blocks line of sight, and moving through the curtain costs an extra square of movement.

Furniture: Cushions, bed, and dresser on the first floor, and Zetch'r'r's throne on the third all count as difficult terrain.

Treasure: The dragon's horde consists of treasure parcels 11, 12, and 16, while Zetch'r'r has a small coffer in his bedchamber. It holds treasure parcel 15.



About the Author

Robert J. Schwalb is a freelance game designer with over one hundred design and development credits to his name. Robert lives in Tennessee with his wife Stacee and his legion of feisty varmints.

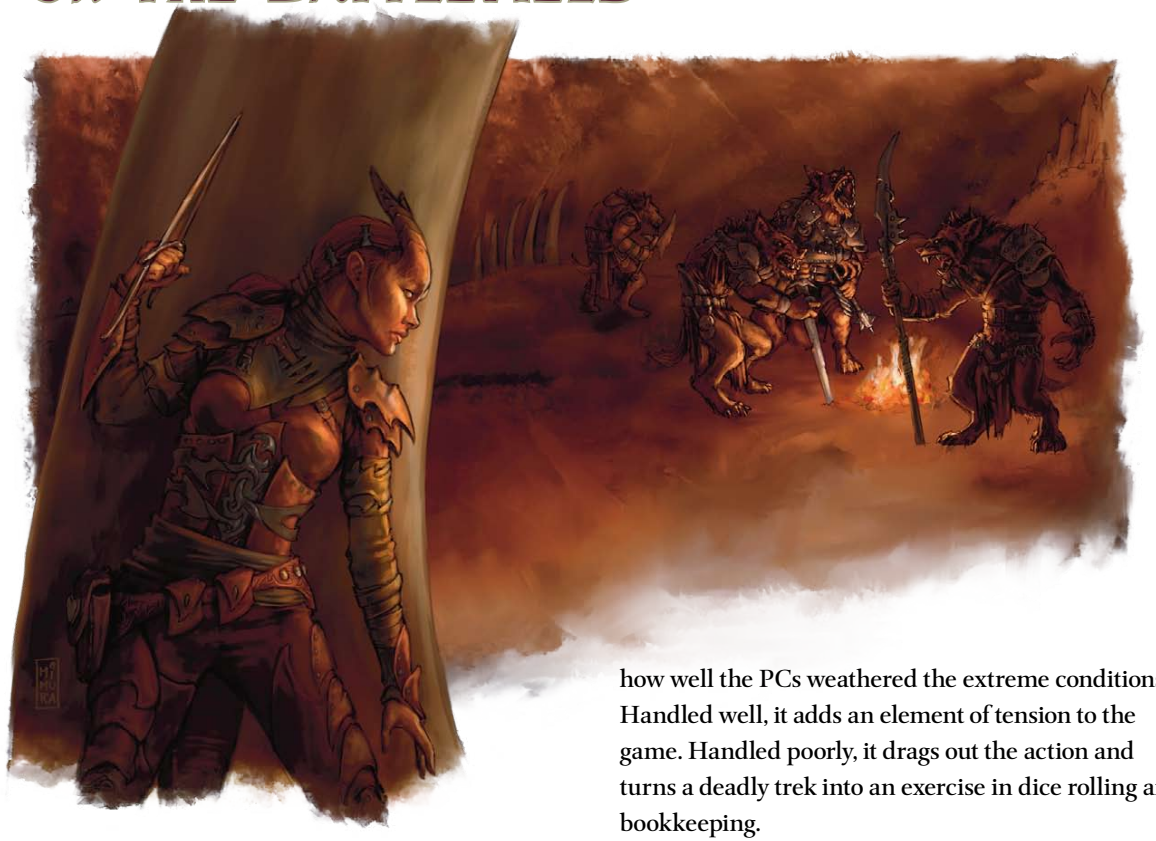
"Perkins, this one is for you."

Life During Wartime: Part 2

Skill Challenges on the Battlefield

BY MIKE MEARLS

Illustration by Raven Mimura



Our journey through the world of skill challenges continues this month with a look at creating challenges relating to travel and exploration. Venturing into the wilderness with half an idea of a destination and faith that, with enough effort, the party can find its way is D&D tradition dating back to the earliest days of the game. Finding the dungeon, or stumbling across a tribe of lizardmen or a nest of giant spiders, was part of the fun of old modules such as *Keep on the Borderlands*. In the wilds of a dark, haunted forest or a troll-infested swamp, danger lurks just behind the next tree.

Creating a travel skill challenge is a little more involved than simply picking a number of skills and putting them together in an interesting structure. Before you can start on that work, you need to think about the wilderness, its role in the campaign, and the tone of your world.

When Travel Requires a Skill Challenge

A good skill challenge evokes a scene or otherwise translates the players' skill checks into their characters' actions, the reactions of the world around them, and the flow of events in the game. When it comes to travel, especially long-distance trips, a skill challenge requires some finesse. On one hand, it's easy to consider making travel purely abstract, with the net success or failure showing how long it takes the PCs to make it to their destination. On the other, too much abstraction risks making the game feel too contrived and artificial. What if the PCs decide to change directions in mid-trip? By glossing over a journey, do you miss out on details that make the game more compelling?

I've played in campaigns where travel across the desert consisted of a long series of checks to determine how well the PCs weathered the extreme conditions. Handled well, it adds an element of tension to the game. Handled poorly, it drags out the action and turns a deadly trek into an exercise in dice rolling and bookkeeping.

Tests of Endurance

A good rule of thumb before designing a travel skill challenge is this: If the only risk lies in physical exhaustion, have each PC make an Endurance check. PCs that fail lose 1d4 + 1 healing surges. Those that succeed lose 1 healing surge. That check covers about a day's worth

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of travel in extreme heat or cold. It's simple, keeps the game flowing, and shows the PCs that there's a clear danger to walking through the desert or across a glacier.

This style of obstacle makes a poor skill challenge because, at the end of the day, the PCs need to make a bunch of Endurance checks. It's hard to justify other primary skills. Extreme weather conditions are a nice backdrop for travel, but rarely are they compelling enough to take center stage. Hand out bonuses to the Endurance check for clever ideas (packing extra water for a trip across the desert, using rituals to ward off the bitter cold), but avoid making this the centerpiece of a skill challenge.

Episodic Obstacles

The heading above is a fancy way of saying that, during their trip, the PCs need to handle a few isolated barriers. These make great complexity 1 skill challenges. For example, the bridge over the Rushing River has collapsed, forcing the PCs to come up with a plan to cross it. A gang of leprechauns harasses folk that enter their forest, playing pranks on them and stealing food and coins from them unless defeated in a contest of riddles. Anyone crossing Fireblast Mesa had best travel at night, as the dragon Klyst swoops down on intruders he spots and demands tribute on pain of death.

It's easy to assume that a long trek through the wilds requires a big, complex skill challenge, but such a move risks making travel too abstract. Episodic obstacles allow you to evoke the feel of your campaign and the dangers inherent to the woods, swamps, and desert in a more active, engaging way. You can create a variety of challenges to pull the entire party into the action. The silver-tongued sorcerer talks his way past the greedy road wardens, sparing the party a hefty tax. The bard defeats a leprechaun in a singing contest, amusing the Verdant Queen and winning her favor. The tough dwarf outlasts the troll in a drinking contest, allowing the party to hogtie the beast after it passes out and sparing a local village from its tyrannical bullying.

The really fun part about this approach is that it allows you to build up lots of details in your world, along with continuing story lines, in the background of your campaign. When the characters return to an area, you can run sequels of sorts to prior skill challenges. Maybe the troll escaped and comes back for revenge, or the road wardens try to ambush and arrest the PCs for tax evasion. These follow-ups don't need to be skill challenges. They are details that bring your world to life. When the PCs enter the Shadow Wood, they know that with the Verdant Queen's favor, they can avoid any harassment from mischievous fey.

The idea is to show the players that their characters have an effect on the world around them. When they pass through an area and interact with the locals, they leave a continuing mark on the campaign world.

This approach works best for areas that you expect the PCs to cross again and again. It's a handy tool for handling shorter trips, even a walk across a city, to show off the situations that adventurers can find themselves dragged into.

The best way to approach this method is to pick out a few NPCs or locations in your campaign, think about how they can affect the PCs' lives, and design a complexity 1 skill challenge, a combat encounter, or even just a roleplaying scene to bring it to life. Take notes on the results and think about how that scene leads to the next one when the characters make a return visit. Don't overlook the value of a scene that calls for merely one skill check or roleplay. Not everything has to be a combat encounter or a skill challenge.

Exploration

Sometimes, the PCs must blunder into the deep wilderness in search of a dungeon entrance, a ruined temple, the spot where a star fell to the earth, or some other location. Done well, this sort of skill challenge brings your world to life and adds an extra layer of danger to any wilderness expedition. It takes a little work to set up, but it can be worth it.

First, you need to create an easily referenced map of the area that PCs are going to enter. I like to use hexagons to map the wilderness, since it makes tracking distances and travel time easier. You can find a few resources on the Internet for printable hex sheets. There are several options out there, but I like incompetech. It's a nifty tool for creating hexagonal graph paper. It outputs a PDF with hexes of a size, line thickness, and color of your choice. You can even specify different paper sizes based on your preferred map size.

I like to scale my outdoor maps so that each hex is a half mile or a mile. At that scale, I can track movement on an hourly basis. It also functions at a low enough scale that I can insert villages, monster lairs, ruins, and other points of interest on the map.

Second, go back to the section on episodic obstacles and take its advice to heart. Find an excuse to seed your area map with interesting goodies for unwary adventurers to stumble into. What monsters live in the area, and where do they hunt or make their lairs? Mark such territories on your map. Where are the settlements, and what sorts of trouble can the PCs get into when they visit each? Are there any secret ruins, weird sites, or other strange locations that provide for interesting scenes?

Remember that not every spot on your map must lead to a skill challenge or a combat encounter. The PCs might come across an obelisk covered in runes. They might inspect it, make Arcana checks to learn that it was built by a priest of Bahamut to ward away evil dragons, and move on. Later, after a cleric of Tiamat moves into the area, the PCs could find the obelisk toppled and shattered. Such details bring the campaign to life and point out that your world is a living, changing place.

Finally, with all those locations in place, you have plenty of interesting spots for the PCs to seek out or stumble across as they venture into the unknown.

Now, you need some simple rules for traveling through the wilds without becoming lost.

Navigation

The following rules aren't a skill challenge, but they serve as a handy wrapper for lending structure to outdoor exploration. Like the Endurance check to resist the effects of an extreme environment, these rules add flavor to the space between skill challenges or serve as a linking mechanism for outdoor encounters.

Wandering through the wilds is no easy feat. Without a road or clear landmarks to follow, even an experienced traveler can become hopelessly lost. This system works best if you use a hex map or grid to track the characters' movement.

As the PCs travel, each hour one character must make a Nature check to navigate. The DC depends on the terrain. As a rule of thumb, you can pick a level and DC relative to the characters' level, or you can create basic DCs determined by the density and nature of terrain.

Terrain Type	DC
Plains, clear ground	15
Forest, hills	17
Dense forest, forbidding mountains	19
Astral sea	23
Elemental chaos	25

Other characters can attempt to aid the skill check, but there are two special rules. First, the attempt to aid another uses the Nature check's DC. Second, a failed attempt to aid causes a –2 penalty to the check. If you've ever argued over a map or directions while driving, you know that wrong advice can be much worse than no advice at all.

If the check succeeds, the PCs travel in their intended direction. If they fail, they wander off course. The PCs instead travel 1 hex (or square) to the right or left of their intended destination. Make these checks in secret, so the PCs are never positive of their progress.

This mechanic is simple, but it's merely a time-waster and exercise in dice rolling if you do not stock the wilderness with monster lairs, weird sites, and other locations as described above. In that case, a few missed Nature checks can send the PCs stumbling into a green dragon's territory, cause them to stumble across a goblin village, or lead them to discover a forgotten temple to Bahamut.

The real fun in this approach lies in watching the party wander the land, stumbling into adventure, and learning about the world around them. It really shines when you have obstacles and encounters built up beforehand. If that's more work than you have time for, or if you want to keep the wilderness at least somewhat vague for future development, you can whip up a table of random encounters.

The easiest table uses a d20. Don't force yourself to come up with 20 different encounters. By assigning some encounters a higher chance to occur, like 1-5 on the table, you can reflect the more common dangers and hazards of a region. Each number on the table you assign to an encounter gives a 5% chance that the characters run across it.

Whenever the characters fail a Nature check to navigate, roll a d20. On a 10 or higher, roll on your table for a random encounter. You can assume that if the PCs succeed in their Nature check, they avoid any unwanted hazards.

The encounter table should reflect the nature of the wilderness. In a dark, fey-haunted wood, the table includes lots of treants, satyrs, and dryads. You should create a mix of creatures that challenge the party and that reflect the game world. If some of the monsters are clearly too difficult for the PCs to fight, be sure to include some option for a noncombat solution to the battle. The PCs might need to run, offer a bribe, hide, or outwit the creature. Part of the fun of D&D lies in creating interesting situations that present lots of options. Embrace that!

Next Month

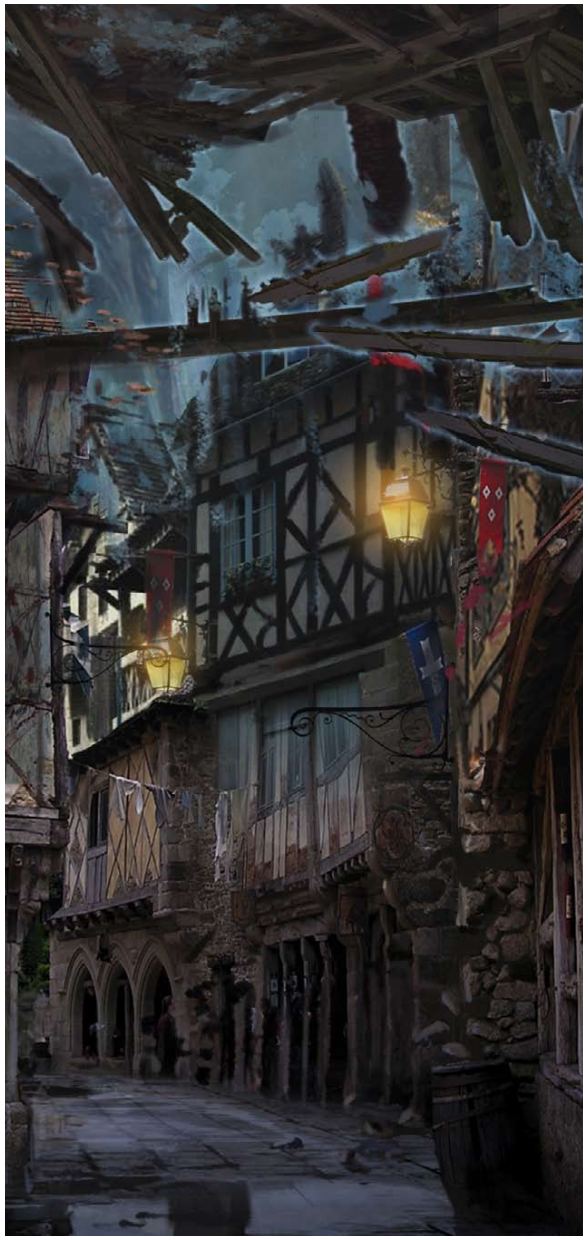
As has been the pattern for this stretch of columns, next month brings you a fully developed skill challenge using the advice given above.

About the Author

Mike Mearls is the Lead Developer for the Dungeons & Dragons® roleplaying game. His recent credits include H1: *Keep on the Shadowfell*™ and *Player's Handbook® II* 2.

Save My Game
Finding Victims

BY STEPHEN RADNEY-MACFARLAND
illustration by Rob Alexander



It's bound to happen. Even if you spend hours writing story and clever snippets of read-aloud text, evenings hovering over D&D Dungeon Tiles counting squares and finding just the right position for those vicious monsters, and days working on finely wrought maps of your world, one day you'll watch your carefully-crafted creation slip though your fingers.

It's not a pleasant experience, either, let me tell you. The first time it happens, you'll feel like someone punched you in the gut. But games are not stories, and there will be times when your game will move in a direction you did not or could not anticipate.

Typically this happens when your players pick up on some throw-away line you uttered to make your world seem larger than the small town or dungeon they're exploring. Before you can say "Mordenkainen," that bit of colorful exposition ignites their imagination and they want to travel to the Cloud City of Venz and want to join the Wind Prince's fight against the invading archons of air, lightning, and thunder. All you can do is look down at your notes detailing another week of caravan duty on the Gyrtolla Steppes with despair as vast as its windswept expanse. Your first inclination may be to clamp down hard on the agents of chaos mucking up your world and find a way to force them to play the game you've prepared whether they like it or not. That's always the wrong tack.

Other times, it will not be your players' fault at all. Instead you'll find yourself run ragged by a procession of real-life obligations and occurrences reducing your 2-hour-a-week planning period to a quick 15 minutes of gathering minis and books just before everyone starts knocking at the door. When this happens, you may be tempted to call off the game or suggest playing a board game, but there is no need for that either.

In these situations, it's time to improvise. Believe it or not, you can plan for these eventually necessary improv sessions, and you probably should. I'll show you how.

Stop Cheating, Start Stealing

I had this friend who was a good DM, but he had a commitment problem. He was always starting campaigns and never finishing them. He would run them for a session or two, three at the most, and then some other campaign setting, roleplaying game, or just an interesting idea would set his imagination afire, and the next thing I knew, we were rolling up new characters.

It absolutely drove me crazy, but I understand the compulsion. I call it a DM's wandering eye.

There are so many great ideas, campaigns, and games out there that it's sometimes hard to stick to the one you're running. Campaigns always have more

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promise and pack more excitement when they are just the kernels of idealized sessions bouncing about in your mind. What you forget when daydreaming about the new campaign is that all campaigns are work—rewarding work to be sure—but each one comes with an amount of toil and problem solving that has the possibility of becoming a chore at least occasionally. Campaigns have good times and bad times, days when they go forward the way you planned and other days when they'll go off the rails. The whole is better than the sum of its parts, because you and your friends get together every week or so and enjoy good times, greasy chips, and stories of daring exploits and perfectly timed critical hits.

A progression of one- or two-session stands is an empty existence, and you know it.

Instead of scrapping your current campaign, sit down and work though the problem. Think about what exactly in the new material is exciting, and then ask yourself this very important question: How can I steal it and put it in my game?

Many of you may be taken aback by this. I know enough canon junkies and setting purists to know that some folks think warforged in *Greyhawk* or draconians in *Eberron* are anathema, but that's nonsense. No matter the setting you use, your first—nay, only—priority is to create fun and excitement for you and your players. The lofty gods of setting purity will never curse you if you cross the streams, and you can ignore all the annoying demagogues on the internet who will. Even they may applaud you if you find a way to do it with panache.

Just by planning this simple act of intellectual larceny, you are taking your first steps toward improvising. You are saying yes to creativity and possibility in your game and not letting yourself be locked down by the perceived borders of the campaign setting. While many of these little flights of fancy will be discarded to the dustbin of creative musing, you'll find gems to explore and will become more excited about your own game when you realize that your wandering eye can bring renewed fun and excitement to the foundation you've already built. It also gets you ready for the next step: the encounter notebook.

It's Not Scrapbooking, I Swear!

Stealing and brainstorming on a macro level is good, clean fun and can create interesting stories and possibilities, but where stealing and brainstorming really gets a you out of a jam is on the micro level.

All things considered, roleplaying games are played session by session. Because of that, D&D has a very episodic nature. As long as you can delight and thrill your players for the four to seven hours in front of you, you're doing your job. There may be holes, play might create mysteries, but you can spend the next week figuring out how to tie together any loose threads and move forward the campaign story.

Because of this reality, I'm always on the lookout for adventures or adventure segments, encounters, skill challenges, and little puzzles that I think are interesting or would be fun to play. I especially look for simple ones that have unexpected twists or turns or interesting terrain features, but not so specific that I don't think I can mold it to my desires on a particular whim. I'll note these, and make photo copies of them, and put them in my DM notebook, organized by level. Usually I will not put these little nuggets in my campaign wholesale, but I may mine them for interesting details like terrains, traps, or skill challenge tech. Many times I leave them there all on their own for those times when I find that the game has moved away from my assumptions or I am lacking the time to give it the attention it deserves.

As some of you may already know, *Dungeon Delve* is a great book for this. While all D&D books have this potential, *Dungeon Delve* is the crunchy center of an improv notebook. Second on my list is my *Dungeon* magazine PDFs. You just can't beat a jumble of adventures each month to mine with reckless abandon.

It's Not Just Theory

I recently had a chance to really put my improv theories to the test. My game was at an exciting climax, where the characters were fighting for life and limb. They also had to make some hard campaign choices about which direction to proceed when they pulled victory from defeat.

I laid out many directions, each of which would affect the main plot of the story a different way. In their midst I also placed a portal that I wanted to use as a monster entry point if one of those choices were made.

Portals are always tricky. They are powerful conduits to give dimension to a world and easy access to points beyond, but players can use them, too. Because the one-way variety always seem a little too blatant a *deus ex machina* to me, I created a story around it, discoverable by a pretty easy Arcana check. The story basically equated to "here there be dragons," and had little to do with the current desires of the characters. I thought I was being pretty clever and safe. I thought chances were slim that the characters were going to use it.

Experience, though, has taught me to plan for all contingencies. It's not worth spending a whole lot of time on something I don't think will come into play, so I went to my notebook and gathered a couple of plot threads, a strange city, a skill challenge, and stole a

chapter from *Dungeon Delve* to detail the main adventure of that passage, just in case.

I'm glad I did. Wouldn't you know it; they went through that portal. Instead of having that "oh crap" moment, I just smiled and went with the flow. Now my players are in the midst of the Shadowfell, dealing with vampires and a certain demi-lich who had the good sense to put contingencies on his portals, and searching for a way back home. And I am having a blast. You'll find its fun when your games surprise you from time to time.

Making It Seem Effortless

The first time you do some DM improve, you'll feel awkward and out of your element. The trick to any kind of improv is to make it feel comfortable, and that means practice. This is why the mental exercise of stealing ideas from other sources to put in your game and tools like the encounter notebook are so important. They exercise your ability to snatch good ideas seemingly from thin air and follow up on those ideas with the tangibles that make a D&D game go—encounters, skill challenges, and bits of plot. Every time you muse on a bit of world that you can steal from another source, or find a bit of adventure you want to run, you are practicing D&D improv. You're roleplaying the roleplaying that will occur. That kind of practice makes perfect.

The next step is to improv before you had to. By realizing that I was leaving a thread dangling in my adventure design, that there was even the slightest possibility that the players might tug on it, keeping an open mind about it, and having enough tools at my disposal to flesh it out without really having to detail it, I was able to move the game along quickly. Over the years I've found that troubleshooting in this manner will save you time and limit the amount of headaches a campaign can give you. Let's face it, you probably have more adventure encounter bits on your book shelves and hard drives than you'll ever be able to use. Put them to work as your adventure second-stringers!

On to the Mailbag.

Creating Stability out of Chaos

I run a regular game at my local game store, but the number of players I get is always inconsistent. Some days we have two players and other days we have nine. While at first it was difficult to make encounters for running that game, I followed your advice about creating a base encounter and adding or subtracting monsters where needed, and that's working out fine. What concerns me is the lack of continuity between gaming sessions and how I can explain it in my game world. For instance, if there are five characters one week, and the next week only three of those but four new characters, how do I remove the missing characters and introduce the new characters without just hand waving it all or spending a lot of time getting them together?
– Game Store William

You may want to think about structuring your game purely episodically. Build a campaign that assumes that the characters are part of a large band, where members can come and go as needed for individual missions. The characters can work as troubleshooters or regulators for a local lord, the members of a ship's crew (pirate, privateer, or explorer), officers in a local military force, or members of a local guild.

Then, shape your plot with an ensemble cast in mind. Story triggers can hinge on character archetypes or can be nonspecific. When you get new players, find a way to explain this aspect of your campaign quickly, maybe with a handout, and you can get players sitting down and rolling dice in no time.

No Time to Update

I took your and James Wyatt's advice, and put together a wiki for my game. I started that monster over spring break and got a lot done, but then classes started again, and I found I had just enough time for game prep each week in the time between work, study, and school, but I never had time to update the wiki. Now the thing is woefully out of date, and I feel like I am going to spend a chunk of the summer updating it, only for it to fall behind again this fall. What am I doing wrong?
– Frazzled Frank

My guess is that you are doing the updates alone. While it is good for a DM to update his or her wiki when there is time, the best thing you can do is get your players to update as well. Most importantly, get another player to put up the session notes. Not only will it free up your time, but you'll get the chance to see the game through the characters' eyes and pick up on things you may not have noticed before. Always make sure to recognize that person and the fine job they're doing.

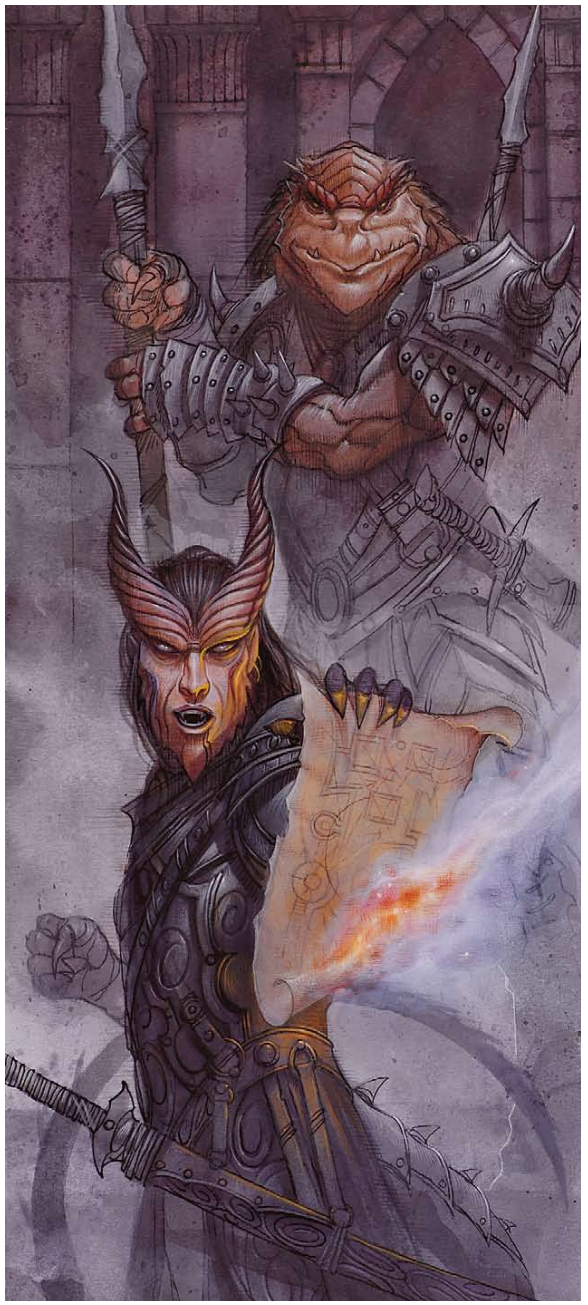
About the Author

Born on a stormy Christmas day, in our nation's capital, during the Nixon administration, the stars were definitely wrong when **Stephen Radney-MacFarland** came screaming into the world. Spending most of his impressionable years as a vagabond and ne're-do-well, Stephen eventually settled in the Northwest to waste his life on roleplaying games.

Once that RPGA guy, Stephen is now a developer in RPG R&D where he doesn't create the traps... he just makes them deadlier. He also teaches a class on roleplaying design for the Art Institute of Seattle, molding the minds of young and upcoming designers. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Episode 15: Super Adventure! (Part 2)

BY JAMES WYATT
illustration by Wayne England



Last time, I talked in general terms about my understanding of the term "super adventure," and how I might plan to turn the Gates of Firestorm Peak adventure from 1996 into a super adventure worth serving as the centerpiece of my Greenbrier campaign. I discussed the single setting, the idea of nonlinear exploration, and the goal of encouraging character specialization to deal with the threats of the adventure. This time, I've promised to discuss the quests that will provide the story glue for the adventure and encourage the players to fully explore the expanded adventure setting. So let's get right to it, shall we?

Multiple Quests and Expeditions

There are two experiences I'm aiming for when I talk about multiple quests and multiple expeditions.

"Multiple quests" means that, each time the characters venture into the adventure site, they've got a list of things they're trying to accomplish. Like trips to the grocery store. They might go in with only one or two quests in mind, then acquire one or two more before they check everything off their list and head out of the dungeon.

"Multiple expeditions" means, of course, that once they head out of the dungeon, they find new reasons to go back in, with new quests in mind.

The original *Gates of Firestorm Peak* adventure provides three hooks that translate easily enough into major quests for the characters to pursue.

Hook: The Cursed Season

Over the past few years, the people of the village of Longbridge have witnessed a marked increase in strange and violent happenings in and around the village. Natural creatures of the fields and woodlands increasingly attack the people of the village, and strange new monsters have begun to appear at the edges of civilized habitation. Even within the population of the village, random acts of cruelty and violence have shown a marked increase. The villagers suspect that these disturbing trends have something to do with the annual flames dancing atop Firestorm Peak, but they can't prove anything for certain.

Major Quest: Investigate Firestorm Peak to determine the cause of the Cursed Season and bring it to an end.

Hook: Diary Fragment

The father of one of the characters (in the adventure, he's a wizard named Nigel) disappeared under mysterious circumstances twenty-seven years ago. Recently, the character discovered a page torn from a diary belonging to his father, dated to two weeks before his disappearance. The diary fragment describes Nigel's interest in Firestorm Peak as the nexus point of a cyclical flux of magical radiations.

Major Quest: Travel to Firestorm Peak and learn more about Nigel's disappearance.

Hook: The Gate of Worlds

A character who is particularly interested in research into magical places of power finds a reference to a site erected by the ancient Elder Elves, called the Gate of Worlds. For reasons unexplained in the source, the Elder Elves fled this site and sealed it within the mountain that housed it—a mountain with a crown of flame. Some time later, the character learns of the Firefestival held in the village of Longbridge, celebrating the annual appearance of a crown of flame atop nearby Firestorm Peak.

Major Quest: Seek out the Gate of Worlds, learn about the magic that powered it, and discover why the Elder Elves fled the area and sealed the Gate.

Of course, in the original adventure, these three hooks and their corresponding quests are meant to be more or less exclusive—the DM is supposed to choose the one most appropriate to the characters and use it to draw the group into the adventure. That single hook is then meant to provide the impetus for the characters to move all the way through to the end of the adventure. If I want to make a super adventure out of this, I'll need to look beyond these three hooks.

The easiest way for me to think about this is in terms of the number of expeditions I want the characters to make:

✦ Their first delve begins in the Shadowfell, and it should be focused on how the effects of the Vast Gate spill into the Shadowfell. They should be able to achieve their initial goals remaining almost entirely in the Shadowfell portion of the Outer Complex, but they should discover the Twisted Caverns and glean at least some hint that the caverns connect to other worlds.

✦ The second delve should begin in the Shadowfell but end in a different world. Perhaps their primary goal is to explore the Twisted Caverns until they find their way to the Outer Complex in the natural world and back out to the village of Longbridge. Or they could have a choice of emerging either in the natural world or in the Feywild, which determines which delve they'll undertake next.

✦ The characters' visit to Longbridge should bring the threat closer to home, as they see the impact of the Vast Gate on their own world. Their third delve, then, should directly address the threat to Longbridge, but I think I don't want them looking for Madreus yet. Instead, I'll send them after the "Lord of the Twisted Caverns," a deepspawn that I'll play up as the source of the monsters threatening the village.

✦ I haven't thought much about the Feywild expression of Firestorm Peak yet, but sooner or later the characters will end up there, venturing into the fey Outer Complex.

✦ That means the quest to kill Madreus and close the Vast Gate's connection to the Far Realm is the fifth and final delve.

Five delves means that I'm aiming for an average of 1.4 levels' worth of experience in each one, or roughly 14 encounters' worth (though quests will account for some of that). That gives me a good benchmark for how much adventure to design each step of the way.

So let's look at each delve and think about the quests and encounters involved.

Saving the Skins

The characters have emerged from Hallows Pass into the vast peat bog, called the Skins, that surrounds the Shadowfell city of Gloomwrought. Next I just need to send them on a pretty basic dungeon adventure, exploring the Shadowfell's version of the Outer Complex. In the world, the Outer Complex is chock full of duergar. A search of the *D&D Compendium* tells me that the shadar-kai in *Monster Manual 2*, as well as the nighthaunts in *Open Grave*, are all about the right level to serve as foes for the characters in this delve. The adult shadow dragon that appears in adventure P3: Assault on Nightwyrm Fortress is also the right level, so the bare outline of an adventure is beginning to take shape. I can boil it down to a couple of quests:

Major Quest: Stop the shadar-kai raids on the Skins by slaying the shadow dragon in Firestorm Peak.

Minor Quest: Find the mysterious dark spirit called the Whisperer and learn its secrets. (This spirit is a nighthaunt whisperer, the undead spirit of one of Nigel's companions on his expedition to Firestorm Peak.)

Minor Quest: Escort one or more prisoners out of the Outer Complex back to their homes in the Skins.

Minor Quest: Discover the secret of the Twisted Caverns beneath Firestorm Peak—that they are a nexus where the three worlds meet.

Encounters: The characters must fight the shadow dragon, will probably fight a lot of shadar-kai, and should also fight some nighthaunts (though the encounter with the Whisperer also incorporates a skill

challenge). These encounters point to the fact that weird, alien energies are emanating from deeper beneath the mountain. The minds of the shadar-kai in particular are warped, and I'll craft one leader figure as a particular example of insanity.

Passage Between Worlds

Having entered the mountain and left again (to escort the prisoners home and collect the reward for killing the shadow dragon), the characters now need an incentive to re-enter the dungeon and find their way out to another world. This is interesting because the objective of entering the dungeon isn't "kill everything inside." The goal is to get through, and the smart way to do that might be to avoid some fights.

Major Quest: Explore the Twisted Caverns beneath Firestorm Peak and discover a way out into either the fey or the natural Outer Complex.

Minor Quest: Assess the impact of the alien energies on the areas surrounding Firestorm Peak in both the natural world and the Feywild.

Encounters: Any creatures the characters didn't kill on their first visit to the shadow Outer Complex are still there, and might be reinforced by more aberrant monsters making their way out from the Inner Sanctum. In the Twisted Caverns, the characters will interact with three factions of monsters who might prove to be enemies or potential allies: the troll mutates in the natural world, the fomorians in the fey caverns, and a group of monsters I think I'm going to use from the forthcoming *Underdark* book in the shadow caverns. Again, the focus here will be on passing safely through the caverns, not necessarily on killing everything in the way.

The characters will probably also learn that there's an Inner Sanctum at the heart of the Twisted Caverns, but they can't get into it yet.

The Cursed Season

When the characters come to Longbridge, they witness the signs of the Cursed Season, as described above. That draws them back into the dungeon to find the source of this madness. At this point, they might also find a fragment of Nigel's diary, leading them in search of him.

Major Quest: End the madness of the Cursed Season by destroying the Lord of the Twisted Caverns.

Minor Quest: Travel to Firestorm Peak and learn more about Nigel's disappearance. (This is a minor quest at this point, because the characters can't find Nigel yet—he's in the Inner Sanctum.)

Minor Quest: Learn what they must accomplish to breach the Inner Sanctum and collect the first key required to open it.

Encounters: Duergar infest the Outer Complex in the natural world, while troll mutates haunt the Twisted Caverns. Again, monsters that the characters killed on their previous delve have been replaced, sometimes with more powerful monsters. The deepspawn called the Lord of the Twisted Caverns is a solo monster that provides a climactic encounter for this delve.

In Search of the Elder Elves

In the Feywild, the characters learn more about the ancient Elder Elves and the Gate of Worlds they created.

Major Quest: Seek out the Gate of Worlds, learn about the magic that powered it, and discover why the Elder Elves fled the area and sealed the Gate.

Minor Quest: Collect the second key required to open the Inner Sanctum.

Encounters: The Outer Complex in the Feywild will be stocked with fey creatures, perhaps remnants of the Elder Elves (perhaps in the form of fey lingerers and fey-knight vestiges from *Monster Manual 2*). Again, fomorians and cyclopses haunt the Twisted Caverns.

The Vast Gate

At last the characters have learned enough of the history of Firestorm Peak and acquired the means to access the Inner Sanctum, so they're ready for one last foray into the dungeon—to open the Inner Sanctum, find and defeat Madreus, and close the Vast Gate.

Minor Quest: Acquire the third key and use the three keys to open the Inner Sanctum.

Major Quest: Find Nigel.

Major Quest: Prevent Madreus from unleashing the full power of the Far Realm on the unsuspecting worlds, most likely by killing him.

Major Quest: Close the Vast Gate's connection to the Far Realm.

Encounters: The Inner Sanctum is filled with horrors from the Far Realm, including alien beings such as the neh-thalggu, the dharculus, and the wyste. Nigel is there, driven mad and bound to Madreus's service. Madreus himself is a powerful alienist, aided by servitors drawn from all three worlds that touch Firestorm Peak.

There's still work to be done before I can set my players loose on Firestorm Peak, obviously, but I'm much more confident now that this adventure will fill the hole I've left for it in my campaign outline. Seven levels of adventuring through one enormous dungeon spanning three worlds—a super adventure indeed!

Now, if only I could get my players together with some regularity so we can get past 3rd level...

About the Author

James Wyatt is the D&D® Design Manager for Wizards of the Coast Roleplaying R&D. He was one of the lead designers for 4th Edition D&D and the primary author of the 4th Edition *Dungeon Master's Guide®*. He was one of the designers of the *Eberron® Campaign Setting* and is the author of several *Eberron* novels.